

PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE: STRATEGIES FOR
DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2015

United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio

Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project

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ABSTRACT

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The researcher's context is the Word of Life Church in Flowood, MS. The researcher has witnessed the challenges faced by women and men in their relationships. Women and men are challenged in developing and maintaining lasting relationships. Therefore, it is the researcher's desire to equip women with strategies which will enable them to develop and maintain lasting relationships. As women are equipped with strategies, the desired partnerships will be formed with men and when problems do occur, regardless of fault, the woman will have the necessary strategies and tools in her repertoire, thereby helping form a lasting, God-based relationship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members for their professionalism and expertise. A special thanks to Dr. Karel Hanhart for his steadfast belief in me and in this project, and for being my rock.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Thomas Dozeman for guiding me through this process. This project manifested because of his thorough input.

I thank Dr. Lori Reiber for taking on the assignment of getting me to the finish line.

Thank you, Dr. Shundria Shaffer, my daughter, for proofreading the project and providing me with invaluable feedback and advice.

I want to thank my big-little brother, Dr. Eric Summers, who provided me with resources and encouragement. I thank him for always proofreading. I especially thank Eric for helping me revive the Methodology for this study.

I want to acknowledge my sister-in-law, Teresa Summers, who printed my papers as I needed them. I thank her for understanding even when it was last minute.

Love, appreciation, and thanks to my church, Word of Life. Finally, thank you to Pastor Joel Sims, for helping me hear His voice.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family and to the ladies who participated. I especially want to thank my mother, Bessie Summers, who has dedicated her life to helping me achieve my goals. My mother has proven that nothing is impossible with God and has been an endless source of strength as I made this journey. She has believed in me and desired that I achieve every goal God has given me. Thank you, Mother.

I also want to dedicate this project to my goddaughter, Tawanda Brown, who stepped in to help me throughout this process. No matter when I needed her, she made herself available. From staying with the children for a week each semester to gathering books from the library, she has always been there. She served as my emotional support and my prayer partner, I thank you so much.

I also dedicate this project to one of the life group participants, Audrey Ashmore, who has given many hours to help me with my boys. When I was behind, Audrey came to stay with me for several weeks to help out. I thank you for that.

Special thanks to my boys, Josiah and Thomas, for regularly praying with me. My boys have understood when I needed time to complete various school related tasks. They have always been supportive. They believe in me and the projects that God has given me.

Finally, I dedicate this project to my dear friend, Robin Wright, who went home to be with the Lord. Robin was a believer and encourager. He was my prayer partner.

INTRODUCTION

This project was birthed from the researcher's deep desire to understand relationships in order to refine strategies which can be used to develop and maintain lasting relationships. Based on the researcher's desire to develop and maintain a relationship with the opposite sex, she decided to study relationships, marriage, and the word of God, in order to discover the elements and behaviors which will result in lasting relationships.

Women and men are experiencing challenges in developing and maintaining lasting relationships. Therefore, for this study, the researcher's desire was to equip women with strategies which will enable them to develop and maintain lasting relationships. When women are equipped with strategies, the desired partnerships are formed and problems will occur, regardless of fault, women will have the strategies and tools in their repertoire to assist in solving the problems, thereby helping form a lasting, God-based relationship.

Chapter One outlines the researchers personal journey through life. It discusses how the context, Word of Life Church, was identified. The chapter goes on to discuss the synergy as it materialized and the ultimate ministry focus of equipping women with strategies that will enable them in developing and maintaining healthy relationships. The researcher's passion for this ministry has developed over many years and she has developed and used various strategies to counsel others who were having difficulties in

relationships. In Chapter Two, the literature review focuses on communication within the marriage, honesty and trust in the marriage, roles within the marriage, fidelity and sex within the marriage, family within the marriage, selfishness and possessiveness within the marriage, compatibility: is God leading, and win/win resolution.

When couples marry, research indicates that one out of two marriages will end with divorce.¹ The divorce rate has nearly doubled from what it was in 1960 with 72% of adults married and in 2008 only 50% of adults were married.² A study conducted by Montenegro for the American Association of Retired Persons, (AARP) included 1,745 respondents. This study listed the three major reasons for divorce as infidelity, growing apart and incompatibility.³

Ryan Messmore, in *An Engaging Proposal*, indicates that the covenant of marriage is further enhanced when Christians include premarital counseling into the marriage process.⁴ It gets the persons involved an opportunity to listen to unscripted responses where they can gain greater insight into the person's beliefs helping the couple clarify and bring understanding.⁵

¹ Soo-Hea Kim Park, *Premarital Care: Preparing for a Lifelong Relationship*, (Dayton, OH: Soo-Hea Kim Park, 2004), 48.

² Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, Inc., 2011), 14.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Ryan Messmore, "An Engaging Proposal," *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity Fellowship of St. James Sidney Australia*. (January/February, 2013): 33.

⁵ Ibid.

Good communication is a key that can open the door to a healthy, happy and stable marriage.⁶ Therapist will tell you that openness is at the root of the strongest love relationships.⁷ Regardless of the male or female perspective on sex, God created sex and it is a process of intimate communication with the act of physical intercourse designed to strengthen the marriage.⁸

The Bible identifies specific and distinct roles for a husband and wife.⁹ The central roles are father and mother, husband and wife.¹⁰ In order to overcome selfishness, you must set priorities, expectations and patterns.¹¹ The basis of marriage ought to be the will of God for two people, not the love of two people for each other because it is sacred and should be a lasting union.¹²

Smalley indicates that there are seven steps to a win-win solution which includes: establishing a no-losers policy, listening to how the other feels, asking God for His opinion, brain storming about a win-win solution, selecting a win-win solution, implementing your solution and evaluating and reworking your solution if necessary.¹³

⁶ Jerry D. Hardin and Dianne C. Sloan, *Getting Ready for Marriage Workbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 26.

⁷ Joel D. Block, *Naked Intimacy* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Books, 2003), 2.

⁸ Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage*, 105.

⁹ Dennis Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage* (Little Rock, AR: Family Life, 1997), 163.

¹⁰ George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2001), 6.

¹¹ Ed Young and Beth Moore, *The 10 Commandments of Marriage* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 24.

¹² William M. Pinson, Jr, *Families with Purposes* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1978), 14-15.

¹³ Gary Smalley, *The DNA of Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), 163-165.

According to Collins, there are nine influences that impact our families: 1. Experiences and incidents from the past, 2. Events and influences in the present, 3. Worldviews, 4. Dreams and expectations for the future, 5. Our decisions and choices, 6. Family stages and transitions, 7. Racial and cultural, 8. Family continuity and constant change, 9. The hand of God.¹⁴

In Chapter Three, the theoretical foundation for this research is established. The Old Testament foundational scripture is Genesis 2:21-24, and the New Testament foundational scripture is I Corinthians 13:1-8.¹⁵ In the book of Genesis, the first marriage was performed by God. The greater part of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and those parts of it which were not written in Hebrew were written in Aramaic.¹⁶ Genesis is one of the five books that make up the first section of the Hebrew Bible. The name by which they were known among the Jews being “The Law,” Torah.¹⁷

In I Corinthians 13, we are told that there are three kinds of love. There is eros which is romance; Phileo which is friendship and agape which is a decision to love. Agape is the God kind of love which is needed within the marriage. Clement of Rome, writing in about A.D 95, refers the epistle to “the blessed Paul, the Apostle.”¹⁸ Morgan states that the apostle dealt with love, its values (verses 1-3), its virtues (verses 4-7), and

¹⁴ Gary R. Collins, *Family Shock* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale house Publishers, Inc., 1995), 16.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the bible.

¹⁶ G. Henton Davies, Alan Richardson, and Charles L. Wallis, eds., *The Twentieth Century Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1955), 98.

¹⁷ Joseph S. Exell, *The Bible Illustrator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), xxv.

¹⁸ Everett F. Harrison, ed., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 1228.

its victory (verses 8-13).¹⁹ Only in the New Testament does love take on its specific Christian coloration as that self-sacrificing love for one another which is inspired by God's love or us in Christ.²⁰ Love is so valuable, so important, that apart from it, every other good thing is useless and we, sometimes, make the great mistake of letting go of what is best for something else that is good, but not the best.²¹

The history of marriage is discussed in chapter three. Marriages were initially formed for economic reasons so that the families involved would benefit. However, things have changed where people marry because of attraction. A marriage is a legally recognized union between two people, generally a man and a woman, in which they are united sexually, cooperate economically, and may give birth to, adopt, or rear children.²² The most famous advocate of the married estate during the fifteenth century was Albrecht von Eyb.²³ The Protestant Reformers of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries replaced the Catholic sacramental model of marriage and the family with a social model.²⁴ Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, parent-arranged marriage and romantic love

¹⁹ G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell company, 1959), 475.

²⁰ Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 457.

²¹ David Guzik, "Study Guide for 1 Corinthians 13," accessed April 7, 2013. http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=8010&commInfo=31&topic=1%20Corinthians.

²² Bryan Strong, Christine DeVault and Theodore F. Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011), 7.

²³ Joel Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation German*, (New York: NY Cambridge University Press, 1997), 60.

²⁴ John Witte, "Consulting a Living Tradition: Christian Heritage of Marriage and Family" *Christian Century* 13th edition, (November 1996), 1108-1111.

existed side by side, but by the Twentieth Century, it became proper and somewhat of a formality for a man to ask for parental permission to marry the daughter.²⁵ Since the 1969 divorce Reform Act in Great Britain, the divorce rate has risen.²⁶

The theological foundation supporting this research is Womanist Theology because this theology affords women and in particular African American women the opportunity to feel that they can fully participate in their local church. Paul carefully selected his words when writing about women, marriage and the challenging the roles for women.²⁷ As a form of Liberation Theology, Womanist Theology aims for the freedom of oppressed peoples and creatures adding the goals of survival, quality of life and wholeness.²⁸ As a form of Liberation Theology, womanist theologies aim for the freedom of oppressed people and creatures adding the goals of survival, quality of life, and wholeness to black theology's goals of liberation and justice.²⁹ Yet in spite of oppression, black women have been empowered by their faith and trust in the Lord to take action. Their narratives contain a theology of hope that empowered them to endure, survive, and even transform oppressive circumstances.³⁰ Womanist Theology branches off in its own direction introducing new issues and constructing new analytical categories needed to

²⁵ Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick, *The Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 59-60.

²⁶ Stephen G. Post, *More Lasting Unions: Christianity, the Family, and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 7.

²⁷ John T. Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher, 1991), 1-3.

²⁸ Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 10.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ A. Elaine Brown Crawford, *Hope in the Holler* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 3.

interpret simultaneously black women's and the black community's experience in the context of theology.³¹

Chapter Four introduces the methodological approach used to test the hypothesis. This study will equip women with strategies that will enable them to develop and maintain healthy relationships. The hypothesis for this project is that if women are strategically equipped with strategies for relationships, then they will be able to develop and maintain lasting relationships. This study will review strategies that will assist in establishing and developing relationships centered on God's promises, which will promote lasting relationships.

Before the project was cleared to be a project, a feasibility pilot study was conducted. The findings from the feasibility pilot study determined that there was a gap in the available research related to marriage preparation. Therefore, the study was needed. Upon surveying the participants within the feasibility study, the participants were asked to list three major problems experienced in their relationships. They were communication, compatibility, family, honesty, roles, trust, infidelity, possessiveness, sex, and selfishness. The project was conducted over a five-week period with ninety minutes sessions. Participants shared more about themselves and their thoughts by completing a pretest/posttest, pre-scenarios/post-scenarios, sessions and surveys. Qualitative research was used. The documents were coded by using open, descriptive and in vivo coding.

³¹ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), xiv.

Chapter Five provides the data analysis and outlines the results of the study. A pretest was given at the beginning of the first session. At the end of the last session, a posttest was given. All answers were compiled by percentages.

In addition, each session began with a related pre-scenario and participants were encouraged to provide answers to the scenario. After the teaching materials were presented, the same scenario was given again to participants. Percentages were used to categorize each yes and no answer.

Post Survey Instruments were given at the end of the five training session in order to determine if participants are now better able to articulate the strategies and characteristics of a healthy relationship.

Chapter Six includes reflections of the researcher on the field experience. Recommendations for the future are given and the strategies for developing and maintaining a lasting relationship are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

This project was birthed from a deep desire to understand relationships and how strategies can be used to develop and maintain lasting relationships. The researcher has always had a profound desire to launch a healthy relationship with the opposite sex. Based on this desire, the researcher decided to study relationships, marriage, and the Word of God in order to discover the elements that result in healthy relationships.

Spiritual Autobiography

The researcher was born and reared in rural Mississippi, raised by her grandparents who were sharecroppers. Her mother and father separated for several years after the birth of her younger brother. Her dad went to find work in Illinois. Upon finding stable employment, he sent for her mother. Their relationship did not work out so her mother returned to Mississippi. Later, she went back to Illinois to find work leaving her two children in the care of her mother.

At the age of eight, the researcher's father died of Hodgkin's disease. Her father had always said that he would not suffer like his mother who had cancer. He had to take care of her during her illness. This had a very negative affect upon her father.

He came down with a high fever and was taken to the hospital. He had probably been very ill before making a decision to get treatment from a doctor.

Although the researcher did not have a close relationship with her father, his death had a strong impact on her life and the choices that she made. The death of her father added to the abandonment issues that were already at work within. Her father's death was the ultimate separation and the researcher felt alone and abandoned, thus causing struggles with an understanding of how to construct a solid relationship with the opposite sex.

Understanding the effects of the death of the researcher's father in her early twenties was difficult. During these years, there was a struggle in building and maintaining a strong relationship with the opposite sex. Initially, there was denial, but after speaking with a friend who was also a counselor, facing the facts was a harsh reality because a true problem existed.

In addition to the inability to establish relationships with the opposite sex, the researcher had not established a strong relationship with the heavenly Father. It was not easy to establish a relationship with the opposite sex because of selfishness and the inability to trust. Part of her struggle with relationships is a result of being independent. Her mother would always say that learning to trust and depend on others is necessary in a relationship. By the age of eighteen, dating seriously and studying how relationships worked was interesting. Knowing how to love and how to get someone to love you back was the most interesting part. At the age of twenty-one, the researcher had her own house, a full time job, working a part-time job, a nice car and was working towards her Bachelor's degree. In 1979, while advocating for equal rights as a feminist, making good

money, there was no need to depend on another. Her view of a relationship with a man was out of line with God's Word. The researcher had a desire to learn more about relationships, however it was not evident to her at the time that God was equipping her to help others with their relationships.

Counseling family and friends on relational issues became a part of life that just happened. These friends and family members needed strategies to steer their relationships in a more positive direction. It became a pleasure to help others understand that relationships require the commitment of time and effort. They do not just happen nor do they last just because we want them to. We cannot will relationships to be healthy. We must intentionally persist. Relationships require daily attention. The "relationship" becomes a third entity. It is the relationship that supersedes the individuals. Sacrifices must be made by each individual that benefit the relationship. These sacrifices done over time cause a continual building of the relationship.

One continues to learn one's job through planned and deliberate professional development activities. Professionals continually update their skillsets to stay current within their field. The same deliberate efforts made to one's professional pursuits can be useful in our efforts to build healthy relationships.

It is amazing that after God created the world, He created the relationship ...out of man, God formed woman and the human relationship began. This relationship was established before the church and before parenthood. God has placed an importance on the relationship between a man and a woman.

The researcher's view on marriage was not consistent with the Bible as it relates to building a strong relationship and marriage, which lead to the following prayer: "Lord,

teach me how to be a wife.” The Bible identifies specific and distinct roles for a husband and wife.¹ The central roles are father and mother, husband and wife.²

One of the first scripture passage to be understood as it relates to marriage is I Peter 3:1-6 which reads:

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing good ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

In studying this scripture, it was necessary to know the meaning of reverence. The Amplified Bible says reverence includes respect, defer to revere him, to honor, esteem, appreciate, prize, and in human sense, to adore him, that is to admire, praise, be devoted to, deeply love and enjoy your husband. Therefore, the researcher believes that a wife is a woman that reverences her husband by showing respect, deferment, honor, esteem, appreciation, in a human sense to adoration, which means to admire, praise, be devoted to, deeply love and enjoy your husband.

Being trained to be a wife is not something that is taught in school or even in church. The desire to marry and have a healthy relationship was very strong within. The thought that God had a plan that should have been embraced was never considered. Most people make decisions and invite God to help them with the decision that they have

¹ Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage*, 163.

² Gilder, *Men and Marriage*, 6.

already made. However, it is most appropriate to ask Him to lead and guide as a decision is being considered. The researcher's life was about making her own choices and decisions. Finally, there was the realization that in order to be a good wife, the word of God must be considered.

This is where the heartfelt message is to the people. If there is no agreement, there will be no lasting relationship. The desire is to teach individuals how to work through their relational problems so that they can have lasting relationships. This is part of the call of God on the researcher's life-helping others learn how to build strong relationships so that when they marry, they can use the Word of God to develop and maintain a healthy relationship.

Ministry Context

In 1980, the Word of Life Church in Jackson, Mississippi, was founded. In the late 1990s, a sixty-five acre tract of real estate was provided. In 1991, the church moved into a larger building. The church has continued to grow. In April, 2001 the pastor went home to be with the Lord. Today, the vision continues and is being carried out by the late pastor's son and daughter-in-law, along with the church staff and congregation. A new and larger facility was opened in April, 2011. Currently, the church has over 3,000 regularly attending members with five services. There is a Wednesday night service from 7-8 p.m.; a Saturday evening service from 5:30-6:30 p.m.; and three Sunday morning services at 8:30 a.m., 10:00 a.m., and 11:30 a.m. Each Sunday morning service is one hour in length. The church is multicultural and very family oriented. The members of Word of Life Church are served by the Pastor, five Associate Pastors, a Youth Pastor, a

Children's Pastor, along with a host of other employees and lay individuals who help to fulfill God's will for this congregation. The researcher is an active member of Word of Life Church.

Synergy

Some of the synergy for this project occurred as the researcher was sitting in church on a Saturday evening. This was the day before she was to leave to attend class at United Theological Seminary. At this point the context for this project had not been established and was very concerning for the researcher who thought she would need to conduct her research in some not yet identified community environment.

This particular evening as the Pastor took the podium as he normally would, he announced that God had spoken to him. God revealed to him that he was doing the congregation a disservice, both individually and corporately, by not opening up opportunities for them to minister in their areas of gifting and calling. He indicated that God wanted him to start small groups which he called "Life Groups." The Pastor invited members to call the church if God had placed a desire in our hearts to lead or minister to a small group. This was very exciting to the researcher and was a direct answer to her prayers for a context for her research. As noted on the Word of Life Church website, "Life Groups are how we build community at Word of Life. We believe life change begins in the context of relationships. Being a part of a group helps a big church feel smaller. Groups connect you with people in a similar stage in life, or with similar

interests. Together, we can develop relationships, support each other, grow spiritually, and see life change happen.”³

So, in August of 2013, Life Groups Ministries were birthed at Word of Life Church. During the spring of 2014, there were fifty-five life groups meeting throughout the week. The researcher has been trained to serve as a Life Group Leader. Group leaders are a team of lay individuals who lead individual subject based small groups each week. The size of the group varies depending on the topic and time of year.

Life Group Leadership Training

As a Life Group Leader, the researcher was given the opportunity to mentor women on topics relating to marriage preparation and the establishment of solid, healthy relationships. The researcher was trained as a Life Group Leader. This training was led by the Associate Pastor and the Women’s Life Group Ministry Leader. These training sessions were intended to prepare the researcher, and other Life Group Leaders, to engage small group instruction under the Life Group umbrella. The researcher used the Life Group template to develop and tailor her training. The researcher was exposed to five training sessions conducted over a five week period of time. The Life Group Leadership training included discussions on the following topics:

- LG Leadership Training 1: The Heart of Life Groups
- LG Leadership Training 2: A Meeting to Look Forward To
- LG Leadership Training 3: You the Leader
- LG Leadership Training 4: Prayer

³ Word of Life Church, accessed November 21, 2013, <http://www.thelife.cc/#!/portfolio-item/life-groups/>

- LG Leadership Training 5: Resources

People come into relationships with different backgrounds and cultures. In addition they come with a diversity of worldviews. There is no logical expectation that we will agree on everything, yet if there is no agreement in a relationship, separation is inevitable. Strategies need to be developed and engaged so that when these disagreements occur, they will be able to navigate to a mutually agreeable place. There are tools that can be used to work through the challenges in relationships.

Engaging in meaningful dialogue expands their repertoire. With guidance, a good decision can be made for the relationship. The researcher believes there is a need for preparation and teaching to help work through the inevitable issues that arise in relationships. It is the researcher's belief that many marriages would continue if women and men are given concrete strategies.

Learning strategies to help in developing and maintaining relationships is the goal. The researcher believes that by learning strategies to develop and maintain a relationship, the possibility of having a lasting relationship is far greater. It is the researcher's belief that when people are provided strategies, they will implement the strategies when difficulties arise. Their repertoire will have been expanded.

Most people are married at some point in their life.⁴ While single, most people think about the type of person they want to marry and when they want to get married. People go to extreme measures to prepare for their wedding day so that it will be memorable and unique. However, there is a step that should occur before the actual engagement. The step that should take place before the engagement is marriage

⁴ Park, *Premarital Care: Preparing for a Lifelong Relationship*, 48.

preparation, which includes strategies for working through difficulties that surely will occur at some point in the relationship. Preparation is seldom considered before the engagement. Typically, couples complete premarital counseling only a few days or weeks before they marry.

People set goals to achieve their heart's desires, which include marriage. However, little to no consideration is given to learning how to develop and maintain a healthy relationship. It seems that people seem to think that working through relationship concerns, problems, and issues, will just happen. This is definitely not the case because people generally respond based upon their experiences.⁵ It's natural to respond based upon what you have already learned and experienced. In order to achieve a dream or a goal, there is always preparation involved. Usually, to achieve a goal, a plan, or a dream, there are strategies outlined. We are taught to write the vision and make it plain (Hab. 2:2).

The persons with a desire to marry should consider appropriate preparation. In this study, the primary focus is learning strategies that can assist in maintaining healthy relationship. It is evident by the number of divorces that there is a need for strategy development to work through problems and/or concerns within the marriage. There is a need to be equipped with strategies.

Students attend school for twelve years. There are laws that require students to stay in school. After completing a twelve year program, many students continue their educational process by attending trade school, junior college, or a university in

⁵ W. Kim Halford, *Marriage and Relationship Education* (New York, NY: Guilford Press. 2011), 2.

preparation for a career. This preparation process helps them perform their duties and responsibilities to a greater degree. Many times, companies require that the newly hired employee attend a series of training before beginning the new job assignment as preparation to be successful.

Learning to develop and maintain healthy relationships is the goal of this research project. The researcher believes that by learning skills to develop and maintain a relationship, the divorce rate will be affected in a positive manner. It is the researcher's belief that when people are provided with strategies, they will implement the strategies when difficulties arise. There are three important elements of a successful marriage: the right choice of a partner, appropriate preparation, and continual nurturing.⁶ Each of these elements should be considered so that the marriage will be successful. In this study, preparation will be focused on the women. It is evident by the number of divorces among those that marry that there is a need for strategy development to work through problems and/or concerns.

It is amazing that there is so little training for developing and maintaining a healthy relationship. God ordained marriage in the beginning as one of the most important processes of life. Thus, the preparation process should be treated just as important as the relationship. One way to attain this goal is by equipping the individuals with strategies on ways to deal with difficulties. It is most fitting that strategies are given for one of the most important relationships established by men and women.

⁶ Park, *Premarital Care: Preparing for a Lifelong Relationship*, 48.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY

There are crucial skills attitudes and knowledge that give partners a better chance of developing and sustaining a healthy, mutually satisfying relationship. Some people acquire these attitudes, skills, and knowledge through life experiences, but many people do not. When some couples are married, they may not be at the same place with the knowledge that has been acquired in life

Many couples divorce because of their lack of crucial skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Therefore, additional skillsets need to be developed in order for couples to be able to maintain a healthy relationship. In order for the knowledge to become more level, there should be training.

Whether inside or outside of the church, both women and men desire to marry. There is, however, little preparation available to assist and prepare them for this important life choice. There should be opportunities available to help them to learn God-based skills that will help individuals understand the building blocks of healthy relationships. If these skills are taught early, while the relationship is young, there may be outcomes leading to more lasting relationships. It is the lack of preparation that leads to

failed relationships. Not knowing how to deal with the issues and concerns that will develop in any relationship, sets the individuals up for failure. This lack of preparation for marriage frequently leads to lack of effort within a marriage to make it what God intended.¹

Three-quarters of all African American children were raised without a father regularly present in the home.² The 1990 U.S. Census reports that 42% of African American adults were married, down from 55% in 1970 and 63% married in 1950.³ Approximately 63% of Caucasians are married as compared to 58% of Hispanics.⁴ The divorce rate has nearly doubled from what it was in 1960 with 72% of adults married and in 2008 only 50% of adults were married.⁵

The Divorce Experience: A Study of Divorce at Midlife and Beyond, provides valuable insight and information. This study involved 581 male participants and 566 female participants. The study revealed that, abuse, lifestyle, value differences, and infidelity, are major reasons couples divorce.⁶

A study conducted by Montenegro for the American Association of Retired Persons, (AARP) included 1,745 respondents. This study examined the circumstances

¹ Pinson, *Families with Purposes*, 13.

² Steven M. Tipton and John Witte, Jr., eds. *Family Transformed* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 2.

³ Karen Duda, *The Reference Shelf: American Family* (New York, NY: Wilson Company, 2003), 44.

⁴ David H. Olson and John DeFrain, *Marriage and the Family* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2002), 11.

⁵ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 14.

⁶ Ibid.

surrounding divorce at midlife and the impact on men and women.⁷ This study listed the three major reasons for divorce as infidelity, growing apart and incompatibility.⁸

After viewing these statistics, it is obvious that many women and men lack the skillsets, knowledge and attitudes crucial to develop and sustain a healthy, mutually satisfying relationship. Some people acquire these attitudes, skills, and knowledge through life experiences. Many do not. In order to level the playing field, it is necessary that both parties in the relationship be near the same place when the relationship starts to develop. Therefore, some level of training for both women and men should take place before establishing a relationship and continuing in the relationship.⁹

In a Christian marriage, there is a commitment to each other and to Christ. When you marry, you enter a covenant with God and your spouse. Throughout the Bible, there is clear distinction as it relates to the covenant between God, man, and the marriage covenant. As God's covenant of grace is made sure by oath, so the essence of the marriage covenant is the vow of consent: a vow that guards the relationship.¹⁰ Both are obligations of faithfulness that include the promise of blessing to those remaining faithful to their covenant obligation which requires sacrifice.¹¹

Ryan Messmore, in *An Engaging Proposal*, indicates that the covenant of marriage is further enhanced when Christians include premarital counseling into the marriage

⁷ Xenia P. Montenegro, "The Divorce Experience: A Study of Divorce at Midlife and Beyond," *AARP*, (May 2004): 4, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/general/divorce.pdf>.

⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁹ Halford, *Marriage and Relationship Education*, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

process. The practice of Christian premarital counseling is valuable as it allows a third party to see how communications occurs. It gets the persons involved an opportunity to listen to unscripted responses where they can gain greater insight into the person's beliefs helping the couple clarify and bring understanding.¹² During premarital counseling, various subjects are covered during the weeks of counseling. During these times, each person is given the opportunity to state their point of view. Many times the couple do not agree. Therefore, decisions must be made on how to handle the particular subject being discussed when they become one.

Communication

Differences will arise in marriages, however, when these differences are resolved with honesty and openness, the commitment will deepen.¹³ Good communication is the art of sending and receiving a clear message.¹⁴ Good communication is a key that can open the door to a healthy, happy and stable marriage.¹⁵ Communication is the most important factor in a good marriage.

Because people enter into marriage with diverse backgrounds and experiences, their views and beliefs are communicated differently. We must be willing to communicate with love. There are five love languages that should be considered when directing

¹² Messmore, *An Engaging Proposal*, 33.

¹³ Hardin and Sloan, *Getting Ready for Marriage Workbook*, 26.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., xvi.

communication to a spouse. They are words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch.¹⁶

Therefore, it is important that we see communication is to the relationship as blood is to the human body. If you remove the blood from the body, the body will perish. If you remove communication from the relationship, the relationship will perish.¹⁷ In resolving conflict, communicating as a sender (or speaker), the goal is for the other party to understand the intended message. As a receiver (or listener), the goal is to understand the speaker's meaning accurately.¹⁸ In order for understanding to occur, the focus must be on getting the process established as to how to share concerns and then moving to the problem. It is important to discover and address the emotion beneath the words.¹⁹

Greg Baer in, *Real Love in Marriage: The Truth about Finding Genuine Happiness Now and Forever*, believes that the key lies in the emotional wellbeing of the couple.²⁰ Real Love is caring about the happiness of another person without any thought for what one might receive.²¹ People need to talk. We are social creatures. Early in the relationship, talking is a key to the right kind of intimacy.²² Therefore, it is important to make time to sit

¹⁶ Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2010), 38.

¹⁷ Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage*, 139.

¹⁸ Joan Hunt and Richard Hunt, *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 247.

¹⁹ Smalley, *The DNA of Relationship*, 133.

²⁰ Greg Baer, *Real Love in Marriage: The Truth About Finding Genuine Happiness Now and Forever* (New York: NY: Penguin Group, Inc., 2007), 4.

²¹ Greg Baer, *Real Love in Marriage*, 4.

²² Eddie George and Tamara George, *Married for Real* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 48-49.

face to face to talk in a relationship. In order for a relationship to grow and mature, there must be consistent honest conversation.

Honesty and Trust

Therapist will tell you that openness is at the root of the strongest love relationships.²³ In a relationship, you want to be able to speak freely and share freely. Not only does openness help lift depression and counter loneliness, it revitalizes intimacy.²⁴ Honesty is one of the most important emotional needs of a relationship and when it's met, love can be triggered.²⁵

Trust is so woven into our being that there is actually a trust hormone, oxytocin, whose main function is to give us the ability to trust.²⁶ Trust-not mistrust-is our default mode as a species.²⁷ We are more prone to trust than we are to not trust a person. Trust becomes easier if we are able to talk to each other about sex.²⁸ Therefore, in a relationship, we naturally desire and want to trust.

²³ Block, *Naked Intimacy*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵ William F. Harley, Jr., *Love Busters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008), 307.

²⁶ Mira Kirshenbaum, *I Love You But I Don't Trust You* (New York, NY: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2012), 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ John M. Gottman, *The Science of Trust* (New York, NY: John M. Gottman, 2011), 251.

Family and Roles

The Bible says to leave and cleave (Gen. 2:24). Therefore, a man must cleave to his wife and the wife is to cleave to her husband. According to Collins, there are nine influences that impact our families: 1. Experiences and incidents from the past, 2. Events and influences in the present, 3. Worldviews, 4. Dreams and expectations for the future, 5. Our decisions and choices, 6. Family stages and transitions, 7. Racial and cultural uniqueness, 8. Family continuity and constant change, 9. The hand of God.²⁹

There are ways to deal with in-laws in a successful way. It is important to realize that your in-laws have a different background. Boundaries must be set even with your parents. It is best to set boundaries with all family members.

After marriage, the couple must negotiate a different relationship with their parents, siblings, and in-laws. Loyalties shift from their families of orientation to their newly formed family.³⁰ Therefore, you must learn to deal with each person that is connected to your spouse. When children grow up and marry, the influence of the parent continues. Children who are now married may have been reared to make good sound choices, but many parents feel the need to step in and tell their children how to make their choices. Parents are to love their children and their spouses unconditionally, allowing them to make their choices. Their lives and their decisions belong to them. Children who are now married must set boundaries so that they are able to make their choices and decisions without the interference of their parents.

²⁹ Collins, *Family Shock*, 16.

³⁰ Strong, DeVault, and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 289-290.

Many times when a man and woman are joined in marriage, there are stepchildren. Recognize that stepchildren are the flesh and blood of and are closely knitted to your spouse.³¹ A marriage will not work when separate lines are drawn.³² The treatment of each child should be as though each spouse was the biological parent. Therefore, each child should be treated as they are one's own biological child.

Marriage actually changes people's goals and behavior in ways that are profoundly and powerfully life enhancing.³³ The Bible identifies specific and distinct roles for a husband and wife.³⁴ The central roles are father and mother, husband and wife.³⁵ Prior to marriage, most spouses have already formulated in their minds a role for themselves and a role for the person they are to marry.³⁶ Discussing role expectations prior to marriage will hopefully counter the unexpected or unrealistic ideals that hinder rather than help the couple work out their respective roles.³⁷

In the book of Ephesians, husbands are commanded to love their wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Husbands need wives to affirm, appreciate, connect, support, encourage, engage, and enjoy them as she stands by him

³¹ Iris Delgado. *Satan, You Can't Have My Marriage* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2012), 11.

³² Ibid.

³³ Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 17.

³⁴ Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage*, 163.

³⁵ Gilder, *Men and Marriage*, 6.

³⁶ Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 83.

³⁷ Ibid.

forever.³⁸ Wives' priorities should be faith, loving and serving their families, therefore, selfishness must be excluded.³⁹ Wives are to love and respect their husbands.⁴⁰ Husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church. (Eph. 5:25). The love and respect must be present in all facets of life. For most people, marital roles lead men and women to act in responsible ways.⁴¹

Flexible family roles, by contrast, may increase the gains from specialization, allowing husbands and wives to take better advantage of their own individual tastes and talents.⁴² There is evidence that African American families socialize their daughters to be more independent than Caucasian families do.⁴³ African American's roles may be attributed to a combination of the African heritage, salary (which subjugate women to the same labor and hardships as men), and economic discrimination that pushed women into the labor force.⁴⁴

Women's work outside the home was and is an extension of their family responsibilities, as well as all family members pooling their resources together to put food on the table.⁴⁵ Therefore, in a marriage, the roles can be specialized according to the

³⁸ Lysa M. Terkeurst, *Capture His Heart* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2002), 13.

³⁹ Darlene Schacht, *The Good Wife's Guide* (Winnepeg, Manitoba: Darlene Schacht, 2012), 2.

⁴⁰ Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing Incorporated, 1999), 4-5

⁴¹ Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 25.

⁴² Ibid., 29.

⁴³ Strong, DeVault, and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 117.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁵ Maxine Baca-Zinn, "Feminist Rethinking from Racial-Ethnic Families", accessed April 6, 2014, www.cabrillo.edu/~lroberts/BacaZinnFeminist.pdf.

desires of the couple. The key is to determine which attributes and combinations best fit the marriage.

Fidelity and Sex

Before marriage, the physical element should not be the most important aspect of the relationship. Many counselors recommend abstinence.⁴⁶ Men and women think differently about sex. Regardless of the male or female perspective on sex, God created sex and it is a process of intimate communication with the act of physical intercourse designed to strengthen the marriage.⁴⁷ Sexual intercourse is for procreation, physical and emotional needs, and pleasure.⁴⁸ God has created you so your thoughts, expectations, feelings, and wishes can become known to your partner through the erotic possibilities your body provides.⁴⁹ Touching, holding, and hugging are not something you should do; they are something you must do to communicate your love for one another.⁵⁰ Marriage is designed to meet that need for intimacy and love and does not mean that individuals should lose their identity.⁵¹

King Solomon wrote a candid and beautiful illustration of sexual intimacy in the Song of Solomon. The fourteenth verse of chapter one states: “My beloved is to me as

⁴⁶ George, *Married for Real*, 141.

⁴⁷ Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage*, 105.

⁴⁸ Gary Chapman, *The Marriage You've Always Wanted* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publication, 2005), 108-109.

⁴⁹ Hunt and Hunt, *Growing Love in Christian Marriage*, 62.

⁵⁰ Hardin and Sloan, *Getting Ready for Marriage Workbook*, 189.

⁵¹ Chapman, *The Marriage You've Always Wanted*, 104.

cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi.” God wants your sexual relationship to be an oasis of refreshment and beauty for you and your spouse.⁵² You must create this oasis of refreshment and beauty for your marriage. There is nothing wrong or bad about creating what is good for your marriage. The Bible says that the marriage bed is undefiled (Heb. 13:4). The marriage contract specifically prohibits sex with those other than the marriage partner.⁵³ In exchange, partners have more confidence in the fidelity of his or her partner, less anxiety about sexual performance, fewer fears of sexual abandonment, and less cause for sexual jealousy.⁵⁴

Couples must make themselves available for sex regularly whether one feels like it or not. Sex in the marriage should not be avoided. Partners in the relationship should not make the other feel that sex with them is a hassle.⁵⁵ In order to help marriages grow, there should be intimacy involved on a regular basis and should include touching outside the bedroom. Research has shown that 70 to 80% of a woman’s physical need is simply to be touched and be held but on the other hand men have a much greater need for sex.⁵⁶ Couples should focus on meeting the other person’s needs, comfort, and pleasure and instead of their own.⁵⁷ Being intimate is not an act of selfishness. With women, this process starts long before the actual act of sex.

⁵² Jim Burns, *Creating an Intimate Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2006), 67.

⁵³ Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 24.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Laura Doyle, *The Surrendered Wife* (New York, NY: Fireside, 2001), 206.

⁵⁶ Gary Small and John Trent, *Love is a Decision* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989), 145.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 154.

According to Chip Ingram in, *Love, Sex & Lasting Relationship*, there are two prescriptions for lasting love: Hollywood's Formula for Relationships and God's Prescription for Relationships.⁵⁸ Hollywood's formula predicts a lasting love will occur once you find the right person, fall in love, and fix your hopes and dreams on this person for your future fulfillment.⁵⁹ If failure occurs, repeat steps one, two and three. However, God's prescription for relationships is predicated on an individual becoming the right person, walking in love, fixing your hope on God and seeking to please him through the relationship. If failure occurs repeat steps one, two and three.⁶⁰

In 1992, the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago conducted a nationwide study in which it asked 3,423 men and women, ages eighteen to fifty-nine, "Have you ever had sex with someone other than your husband or wife while you were married? According to the responses of this study, as many as thirty-seven percent of married men, and twenty percent of married women have been unfaithful.⁶¹ In the United States, one in every 2.7 couples, is touched by infidelity.⁶² The new infidelity is between people who unwittingly form deep, passionate connections before realizing that they have crossed the line from platonic friendship into romantic love. The essence of the new crisis of infidelity: friendships, work relationships, and internet liaisons, have become

⁵⁸ Chip Ingram, *Love, Sex & Lasting Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 50.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Janis Abrahms Springs and Michael Springs, *After the Affair* (New York, NY: First Harper Perennial, 1996), 260-261.

⁶² Ibid.

the latest threat to marriage.⁶³ In the past, infidelity was considered actually having intercourse with a person that you were not married to. Today's affairs are more frequent and more serious than they used to be because more men are getting emotionally involved and more women are getting sexually involved.⁶⁴ Forming friendships and having intimate conversations can all lead to infidelity. Although friendships will be formed outside of the marriage, it is important that the marriage be protected at all cost and friendships that are formed should be closely monitored.

Selfishness and Possessiveness

Possessive people are jealous people who have learned this behavior.⁶⁵ Self-defeating behavior is characteristic of the jealous or possessive person and is a problem to both parties.⁶⁶ Selfish and possessive people go to great lengths to state what they feel is right and they believe every word that they say even though they may be wrong. However, possessive, jealous, selfish people defend their position to the very end. When two persons make a decision to have a relationship which may lead to marriage, there must be an understanding that no one person is perfect. People are born with flaws and flaws continue throughout life. People are always a work in progress. There will be problems in the relationship. There will be disagreements as the two individuals become

⁶³ Shirley P. Glass and Jean Coppock Staeheli, *Not "Just Friends"* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2003), 1

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Hauck, *Overcoming Jealousy and Possessiveness*, 138-139.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 20.

one. However, in every enduring marriage there is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person.⁶⁷ Since the beginning, man and woman demonstrated that they were not perfect. So, it cannot be expected that a man or a woman will be perfect in a relationship.

Smith explains in *Marriage Isn't for you: It's for the One You love*, that he was having some concerns and fears about getting married when he learned that marriage is about the person you will marry.⁶⁸ The author's father had a conversation with him and explained that marriage isn't for you, it's not about you.⁶⁹ Marriage is about the person you married. A true marriage (and true love) is never about you. It's about the person you love—their wants, their needs, their hopes, and their dreams. Selfishness demands, “What's in it for me?”, while Love asks, “What can I give?”⁷⁰ Therefore, if we desire for our marriages to move forward instead toward the divorce court, one should give their spouse the first consideration. We should consider our spouse before ourselves.

The Bible tells us that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20: 35). It further states that we are to do nothing out of selfish ambition but in humility regard others better than ourselves as recorded in Philippians 2: 3. We all suffer from the sin of selfishness. It lies at the heart of nearly every marital problem. Selfishness includes four symptoms: immaturity, time choices, insensitivity, and stubbornness.⁷¹ In order to

⁶⁷ Small and Trent, *Love is a Decision*, 108.

⁶⁸ Seth Adam Smith, *Marriage isn't for You: It's for the One You Love*, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://sethadamsmith.com/2013/11/02/marriage-isn't-for-you/>,

⁶⁹ Smith, *Marriage isn't for You: It's for the One You Love*.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Young and Moore, *The 10 Commandments of Marriage*, 24.

overcome selfishness, you must set priorities, expectations and patterns.⁷² One illusion married couples fall for in this new age of liberation is the belief that they can both be “independently successful” and still have a great marriage.⁷³ When a man marries a woman, they become one. Therefore, there should be goals and plans that the couple has for the relationship not just independent plans. Each person in the relationship should work together to develop a plan for the future of the relationship. There should be a vision for the relationship.

Compatibility: Is God Leading?

If you will seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness and let that desire drive your decision regarding who you choose to marry and refuse to compromise on that, you will set yourself up for a much more fulfilling, spiritually enriching, and satisfying marriage.⁷⁴ Compromising will lead to great frustration and regret.⁷⁵ By listening to the Spirit of God, you will know if God is saying “yes” or “no” to a relationship. Upon starting to date and getting to know a person, many times the emotional being is very excited and forgets the Spirit of the living God who is present to give guidance and help in making good decisions. Each person should present the idea that they are interested in moving forward in a relationship with the person to the Lord. Through prayer, an answer will be revealed as to whether to continue in a relationship

⁷² Young and Moore, *The 10 Commandments of Marriage*, 24.

⁷³ Dennis Rainey, *Staying Close* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.), 62.

⁷⁴ Gary Thomas, *The Sacred Search* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 22.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

with the person of interest or not to continue. The basis of marriage ought to be the will of God for two people, not the love of two people for each other because it is sacred and should be a lasting union.⁷⁶

There are three foundational components that forms an Oneness Marriage: developing intimacy, trust and understanding.⁷⁷ King Solomon spoke of the mortar of the marriage merger in Proverbs 24:3-4, “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” Before a decision is made, the other person must be considered. Decisions must always be made with the spouse in mind.

Win/Win Resolutions

Happily married couples use certain techniques to resolve conflict, including summarizing, paraphrasing, validating, and clarifying.⁷⁸ Often, unhappy couples use confrontation, complaining, and defensiveness.⁷⁹ Problems are solved when your message is described accurately by your partner, and you both have the same understanding of its meaning. There are three observable steps in communicating a message: clear messages are spoken, summarize the main points, and the sender confirms that the summary is accurate.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Pinson, *Families with Purpose*, 14-15.

⁷⁷ Rainey, *Staying Close*, 28.

⁷⁸ Strong, DeVault and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 246.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hunt and Hunt, *Growing Love in Christian Marriage*, 84.

In a healthy relationship, everyone wins. According to Gary Smalley in *The DNA of Relationships*, there are seven steps to a win-win solution. It's a team approach, therefore, if the team wins, then everyone wins and if the team loses, then each member loses.⁸¹ Smalley indicates that there are seven steps to a win-win solution which includes: establishing a no-losers policy, listening to how the other feels, asking God for His opinion, brainstorming about a win-win solution, selecting a win-win solution, implementing your solution and evaluating and reworking your solution if necessary.⁸² Happy couples regard their marriage as a work in progress that requires constant attention lest it fall into disrepair.⁸³

Conclusion

Crucial skills that are needed for development and maintaining marriage. Some of the skills needed are communication, honesty, trust, roles definition, fidelity, sex, family, selflessness, compatibility, God's leadership, and win/win resolution. Communication is important in a good marriage. However, we must be willing to learn the best way to communicate to a partner. Speaking freely, openly, and honestly is crucial to the success of a marriage. Trust is a choice, a skill to learn and share within a marriage.

For those that desire to marry, God will lead. He will speak through His word to guide each man and woman to the person that is best for them.

⁸¹ Smalley, *The DNA of Relationships*, 163-165.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1995), 331.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Biblical Foundations

In relationships with the opposite sex, each person should be willing to show the love of God to the other person even though they may not be shown the same love. God is looking for willing vessels, those willing to cooperate with Him and His way. Many opportunities will be presented to demonstrate love. A decision has to be made even before an opportunity is presented. One has to make a decision that they will respond to each situation in love, God's love. It is a decision and a choice. We are born into sin, therefore, it is easier to choose to respond in a negative manner when we do not receive the treatment that we desire. Many times demonstrating hatred rather than love is easier. Love is demonstrated in many ways and one has to make a quality decision to love. When responding to others in love, it causes them to learn how to respond in love also. The love of God is not verbal, it is demonstrated by action.

Many people go into relationships desiring to do what they want to do when they want to do it. There is often great selfishness and independence in relationship and marriage. Many marry and place jobs, children and other situations before their relationship with their spouse. However, through preparation as one moves into

relationship with the opposite sex, dependence upon the Lord God is encouraged and learning the order of a relationship is necessary. We need to practice what Jesus practiced. Whenever he was going somewhere, he told his disciples. Jesus was not a selfish man, but was kind, gentle, caring and loving.

There are several biblical passages that will guide the foundational research for this study. The Old Testament scripture is Genesis 2:21-24 and the New Testament is 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Genesis 2:21-24 says:

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis is a name taken from the Greek. In the Septuagint it is referred to and signifies the book of generations or production.¹ The narrative reaches to the death of Joseph, 713 years after the deluge or 2369 years from the creation, and 1635 years before Christ.² The greater part of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and those parts of it which were not written in Hebrew were written in Aramaic.³ Both Hebrew and Aramaic belong to what has for well over 150 years been conveniently called Semitic family of languages where Hebrew is written from right to left.⁴

¹ Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott (Nashville, TN: Royal Publishers, Inc., 1979), 1.

² Ibid.

³ Davies, Richardson, and Wallis, *The Twentieth Century Bible Commentary*, 98.

⁴ Ibid.

Genesis is one of the five books that make up the first section of the Hebrew Bible. The name by which they were known among the Jews being “The Law,” Torah.⁵ The Jews divided their Bible into the following classifications: “The Law, The Prophets, and The Holy Writings.”⁶ In Christian tradition these five books are generally referred to as the “Pentateuch.”⁷ Luther gave them the name “The Five Books of Moses,” in line with the post-biblical tradition that Moses was the author of this entire body of material.⁸ The Pentateuch, a Greek term, means ‘five scrolls’.⁹ They describe the origins of Israel as a people and the revelation of God that created the nation in the first place, and through the law determined their whole way of life.¹⁰

The writer of the Pentateuch is believed to be Moses where his unity of the acts and writings of a living man through a period forty years confirms his identity; the historical Moses of the Bible, the author of the four special Mosaic books is thoroughly consistent in all his writings.¹¹ The process by which the Torah and the Bible as a whole took shape and gained authority in the Jewish community probably took place from the time of the Babylonian exile (587 B.C.E) to about 300 B.C.E.¹² During the Maccabean

⁵ Exell, *The Bible Illustrator*, xxv.

⁶ J. B. Cranfill, *An Interpretation of the English Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 22.

⁷ Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible* (Leiderdorp, The Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 2005), 11.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, ed., *New Bible Commentary*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 43.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Exell, *The Bible Illustrator*, xxviii.

¹² William R. Framer, ed., *The International Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 344-345.

and early Roman period (170 B.C.E. -70 C.E.) the books of the Law, the Torah, became a political and religious symbol for the Jewish way of life.¹³

In Genesis 2:18, God said, it is not good that man should be alone. . . This passage does not suggest man had become lonely or that God thinks the man needs a wife, though at the conclusion of this chapter, God gives him a wife.¹⁴ Literally, what God says about the man is that it is his “aloneness” or solitude that is not good because the man has no one “like himself” to help him, either in worship or any of the other jobs afforded him in the garden.¹⁵ The Bible’s first description of the marriage union is found in Genesis 2:18-24 and is an exclusive relationship and a lasting commitment enduring for the life of the couple.¹⁶

The woman will consider the man as part of her very being, and the man will see the woman as the help he needs, without whom he is incomplete.¹⁷ In this way, the man will help his wife to live up to her potential, with thankfulness for God’s gift of companionship.¹⁸

Tribal states that ambiguity characterizes the meaning of Adham in Genesis 2-3 where Adham is a generic term for humankind with Adham is incorporating two sexes

¹³ Framer, *The International Bible Commentary*, 344-345.

¹⁴ Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, Eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis – Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 80.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁶ William M. Pinson, Jr., *The Biblical View of the Family* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1981), 40-41.

¹⁷ Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: Africa by WordAlive Publishers, 2010), 14.

¹⁸ Adeyemo *Africa Bible Commentary*, 14.

which is androgynous.¹⁹ Throughout the events of creation, Eve was created last in the garden, which gives the impression that she is subordinate, however, she is the culmination not an afterthought.²⁰ When you think about the word, culmination, you think about completion. Even though God created Eve from the rib of Adam, many believe that woman completes Adam not competes with him. The new creation which man needs is called a helper ('ezer), which is masculine in gender, though here it is a term for woman. This particular word denotes one who has only an associate or subordinate status to a senior member is refuted by the fact that most frequently this same word describes Yahweh's relationship to Israel.²¹

God is the helper of Israel.²² So, woman is the helper of man just as God is the helper of Israel. Therefore, one can say a woman compensates a man in the areas that he is weak. Woman was created to walk alongside man not behind man. Woman was created to work with man. They are partners that support, encourage, and help each other complete the assignment that comes from God. When a man marries a woman, there is an assignment for them from God. People, when submitted to God, do not marry just to marry. God has a purpose for them to fulfill. Tribble translation is: God is the helper superior to man; the animals are helpers inferior to man; woman is the helper equal to

¹⁹ Phyllis Tribble, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread". *Andover Newton Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (March 1, 1973): 251-258. ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, EBSCOhost, accessed March 24, 2014

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Victor P Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 175.

²² Tribble, *Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread*, 252.

man.²³ Speaking of the formation of Eve from Adam, one of the older commentators has remarked that “she was not made out of his head to surpass him, nor from his feet to be trampled on, but from his side to be equal to him, and near his heart to be dear to him.”²⁴

The woman is God’s free creation.²⁵ Eve was made from the rib while Adam was made from the dust of the ground. Yahweh alone creates.²⁶ Man was and is not the creator of Eve, he was asleep. God’s ordained program unfolded when He created male and female and called it very good. The woman was made to be a help meet for the man. She comes alongside the man to help him fulfill the assignment from God. God said that it is not good that the man should be alone (Gen. 2:18). He needed someone like him. We see the Creator’s care of man, and his fatherly concern for his comfort.²⁷ God pitied his solitude and graciously resolved to provide society for him by making him a help meet.²⁸

Woman was created from the rib of man to aid. She was created to help. A help meet assists and supports her husband. Woman was created to be man’s partner.²⁹ Man’s mind was prepared by God to see the necessity of a companion and God, by a spiritual anesthetic, brings man’s body into a state of painless insensibility, and while in that state takes from him a part of himself near his heart, and out of that fashions a man’s

²³ Tribble, *Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread*, 252.

²⁴ James M. Gray, *Home Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1985), 14.

²⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation: Genesis* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 47.

²⁶ Tribble, *Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread*, 253.

²⁷ Henry and Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ James Strong, *The Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 87.

companion.³⁰ The Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and then He made woman. God built woman not man. God put man to sleep and performed surgery as he created Eve from Adam's rib. Adam did not even seem to know that he needed a woman. However, after awakening from the surgery, Adam was delighted that Eve was made for him. God married this first pair.³¹ Adam welcomed her into her role. Meet for him is an emphatical phrase signifying one correspondent to him, suitable both to his nature and necessity, one altogether like to him in shape and constitution, disposition and affection, a second self.³²

So, out of the rib of man, God forms woman. Gen. 2:23-24 comment positively on the closeness of the conjugal bond.³³ This popular play on words, based on similarity of sound, springs out of a unique relationship: bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh as the narrator goes on to explain in verse 24. The man and woman realize that oneness which belongs to their God-given nature, they became one flesh.³⁴ They become one flesh, one personality. The meaning of flesh is reflective of more than the physical side of life; it is the medium through which the whole personality communicates its varied emotions, longings, joys and fears.³⁵ When a man marries a woman, they become one

³⁰ B. H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 81.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

³² Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, 1990), 7.

³³ Carol a. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Woman's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 16.

³⁴ Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11* (New York, NY: Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1973), 37-38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

whole person even though they are two people. So, in the eyes of their Creator, God, they have been united as one.

After creating woman, her role is played out throughout the balance of the Bible.

One of the most prized possessions that a woman and man can give to each other is unconditional love, just as Christ has given to each of us. First Corinthians 13 helps us to understand the importance and impact of unconditional love.

Here Paul says:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. (1 Corinthians 13: 1-8)

Clement of Rome, writing about A.D. 95, attributes this epistle to, “The blessed Paul, the Apostle.”³⁶ The internal evidences of style, vocabulary, and content harmonize with what is known of both Paul and Corinth and it is a genuine product of Paul, the Apostle written in Ephesus about A.D. 55.³⁷

According to Vanderwaal, the Christians in Corinth had become far too attached to particular forms and did not seem to be aware that the forms then current would have

³⁶ Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 1228.

³⁷ Ibid.

to make way someday for other forms.³⁸ Paul makes it clear that love is and remains the way for Christians to deal with each other.³⁹

Morgan states that the apostle dealt with love, its values (verses 1-3), its virtues (verses 4-7), and its victory (verses 8-13).⁴⁰ The values of love are discovered in the fact that, apart from it, all the best things are worthless; its virtues are shown with force and beauty; the apostle showed how it is supreme because of its victory.⁴¹

This supremely beautiful chapter speaks first of the superiority and necessity of love—gifts are nothing without love and then describes the essential character of Christian love.⁴² The word agape (love) is used in the New Testament of the deep and abiding affection of God and Christ for each other (John 15:10 and 17:26) and for us (I John 4:9).⁴³

During the time that Paul wrote this epistle, the people were experiencing an array of challenges. There were those that considered themselves elite and superior which caused Paul to have to address the problem of inferiority felt in the colony by the non-elite.⁴⁴ For the curious minds and corrupt lives of the people at Corinth, Paul proclaimed

³⁸ Cornelis Vanderwaal, *Search the Scriptures: Corinthians-Philemon* (Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1979), 28.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell company, 1959), 475.

⁴¹ Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, 475.

⁴² Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 267.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Carson, *New Bible Commentary*, 1163.

a supreme message, “the word of the cross.”⁴⁵ The wisdom of God and the power of God shown forth in a crucified Christ are the theme of the early chapters of First Corinthians.⁴⁶

In I Corinthians 13:1, Paul uses the Greek word agape. The ancient Greeks had four different words to translate love. Eros was one word for love describing erotic love referring to sexual love. Storge was the second word for love referring to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child, or between family members in general. Philia is the third word for love meaning brotherly friendship and affection which is the love of deep friendship and partnership. It might be described as the highest love which man, without God’s help, is capable of. Agape is the fourth word for love which is a love that loves without changing. It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting repayment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected. When agape love is demonstrated, it is because a person has chosen to love; it does not demand or expect repayment for the love given. It gives because it loves, it does not love in order to receive. According to Alan Redpath, we get our English word agony from agape. “It means the actual absorption of our being in one great passion.” Redpath, strictly speaking, agape can’t be defined as “God’s love,” because men are said to agape in and the world.

⁴⁵ F. C. Eiselen, Edwin Lewis and D. G. Downey, *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1929), 1170.

⁴⁶ Eiselen, Lewis and Downey, *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, 1170.

But it can be defined as a sacrificial, giving, absorbing love. The word has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another.⁴⁷

Paul's hymn is not an abstract speculation about love but rather a concrete pastoral insight that the use of spiritual gifts must spring up from the soil of love.⁴⁸ Paul named five spiritual gifts: tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and give (sacrifice). Paul pointed out that, without love, the exercise of these gifts is nothing. Love is essential to all aspects of life. Even when one speaks in tongues, without love, it is nothing. Even though you have the gift of knowledge, without love it does nothing. Without the love of God in one's heart, it is hard to just simply love another person as Christ does. This love must be placed in one's heart by the Holy Spirit. Loving another takes God working within one's heart so that no matter what is said or done, love is demonstrated through it all. It is love that enriches the gifts and that gives them value.⁴⁹ Demonstrating the other gifts is the easy part, but demonstrating love takes extra assistance from the Holy Spirit.

In First Corinthians 13, Paul uses the Greek meaning of the word love, agape. Without love three results ensue: I convey nothing, I am nothing, and I gain nothing.⁵⁰ When the gift of love has been given by God, it becomes easy to forgive. The gift of love within the heart enables sacrificial living and giving. This love allows a person to become

⁴⁷ Guzik, *Study Guide for I Corinthians 13*.

⁴⁸ Gail R. O'Day and David L. Petersen, eds., *Theological Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 390.

⁴⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 610.

⁵⁰ F. F. Bruce, H. L. Ellis, and G. C. D. Howley, *The International Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 1376-1377.

selfless. Only in the New Testament does love take on its specific Christian coloration as that self-sacrificing love for one another which is inspired by God's love or us in Christ.⁵¹

Divine love is a product of communion with the Holy Spirit and is necessary for effective spiritual formation of saints. Without love and proper application, the exercise of the sanctifying gifts of the Holy Spirit fail to be effective in reaching their desired goal—namely, they fail to develop people towards maturity in Christ. The ideal of having all knowledge (Gr. "gnosis"), having all faith, and understanding all mysteries (Gr. "musterion,") while certainly desirable and characteristic of Christ, is nothing without divine love.⁵² Divine love is supreme above all. So, as with the other spiritual gifts, maximum altruism and self-sacrifice (i.e., giving "all my goods") apart from divine love are useless the spiritual gifts are exercised with love.⁵³

Love is so valuable, so important, that apart from it, every other good thing is useless and we, sometimes, make the great mistake of letting go of what is best for something else that is good, but not the best.⁵⁴ The theocentric nature of love in this chapter is reflected in that much of what Paul says about it was previously affirmed of God in the Old Testament and early Judaism (and is said about God by Paul himself elsewhere).⁵⁵ Patience and kindness are God attributes.⁵⁶ The proper movement of love

⁵¹ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 457.

⁵² "Commentary on 1 Corinthians Chapter 13", accessed April 5, 2013, <http://www.preteristvision.org/commentaries/1cor13.html>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Guzik, *Study Guide for 1 Corinthians 13*.

⁵⁵ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 739.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

begins with attention to the needs of the other person.⁵⁷ Imbedded with the prologue (I Cor. 13:1-3) are two convictions: (1) Love's nature is to seek not one's own needs but the needs of others, and (2) in so doing, love ultimately secures not only the other person but also one's own self.⁵⁸

Without love in one's heart, it becomes extremely difficult to move forward in a relationship. All other gifts hinge upon the love of God in the heart of man being demonstrated by actions. In relationships, when the gift of the love is in full operation, the couple's hearts are open to forgive. Forgiving is something that is desired when you truly love as God loves. You want to forgive. You make a choice to forgive, a decision that there is nothing that a person can do or say to keep you from forgiving. Couples forgive willingly without pressure when the love of God is working in their heart. When agape love is operating, love comes easily and naturally. Love is shown because one wants to show love not because a person is made to love or pushed to love. When agape love has been imparted into the heart of man or woman by the Holy Spirit, it becomes easy to share and to love.

In verses one to three, the apostle shows that love not what is meant by charity, in our common use of the word, which most understand of almsgiving, but love, in its fullest and most extensive meaning; true love to God and man; a benevolent disposition of mind towards our fellow-Christians.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol X (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 952.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ William Jenks, *Comprehensive Commentary of the Holy Bible: Scott's Marginal References Matthew Henry Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott and Co, 1860), 300.

In verse four, several of the positive verbs (“love is patient...kind...rejoices with the truth ... always trusts”) link directly with other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: “patience”, kindness, joy, and faithfulness.⁶⁰ There is a chiasm which states that love is patient and that love is kind. Love is enhanced in verse seven with the demonstration of the fourfold repetition of “all.” Love bears all. Love believes all. Love hopes all. Love endures all things. Sandwiched between the definition of love and the demonstration of love, verses four and five further characterized the term, love, by identifying seven negative verbs which informs the reader what love is not. Love is not envious, boastful, arrogant, rude, irritable resentful, and does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth.⁶¹ John Hurd pointed out that if we take the negative characteristic and remove the “not,” we get a pretty good description of the Corinthian’s conduct within their church circle: envious, boasting, arrogant, rude, self-seeking, easily offended, and looking to see what others were doing wrong.⁶²

Lange states that in verses 4-7, we have a eulogy of love in a description of its qualities, setting forth its superior excellence both positively and negatively.⁶³ The beauty of the description is heightened by a personification of love, to which those things are ascribed that are found in such as truly love.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Longman and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians*, 372.

⁶¹ Farmer, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1624.

⁶² Longman and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans – Galatians*, 372.

⁶³ John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1868), 269.

⁶⁴ Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 269.

Love endures regardless of the problem. Love endures regardless of the situation. Love endures no matter how hard or how difficult a situations may become. Love outlasts everything that could possibly occur within a relationship. Love is not self-centeredness.⁶⁵ Love is kind. Love is gentle. Love is forgiving. When problems come, they should be countered by demonstrating the love of God that is on the inside. People have to remember how love responds. Love responds or is demonstrated through selflessness. When love is demonstrated and perfected, couples are well able to work past any situation or circumstance. When you love, you give of yourself even when you do not desire to do a thing. Love causes you to do that which you may not want to do for the betterment of the other person and the relationship. Love causes you to choose to do that which is right for the other person and the relationship. Love is giving to the other person in time, energy and effort. Love is a decision, a choice.

Some of the properties and effects of charity are given in verses 4-7 so that we may know whether we have this grace; and if we have not, we may not rest till we have obtain it,⁶⁶ Christian love is described positive and negatively in verses 4-7 where the positive is patience and kindness (v. 4a) and (vv. 4b-6a) state love's characteristics negatively.⁶⁷

This love is clear evidence of regeneration, and is a touchstone of our professed faith in Christ.⁶⁸ In essence, even though a person is spoken to in a manner that is

⁶⁵ Watson E. Mills and Richard F. Wilson, *Mercer Commentary on the Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 1183.

⁶⁶ Henry and Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 122.

⁶⁷ Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 268.

⁶⁸ Henry and Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 122.

offensive, because of the love of God that is operating in the heart and the grace that love gives, one would naturally respond in a manner that is not offensive. A soft answer is always more pleasing than a harsh answer. It is said that you can catch more bees with honey. The goal of agape love is to be able to treat each person that one interacts with by demonstrating the love of Jesus. In order to be clothed with this love, one must have the Spirit of the living God residing, actually living, on the inside. It is impossible for man, woman, boy, or girl to attain this love without having the help of the Spirit of God.

In a healthy relationship one must be patient and kind. One must die to self and seek to serve the other person willingly. In a relationship or marriage, it is not about the person, it's about the other person and the actions that one can take to make the other person better. During the relationship process, one must forgive as one endures personal wrong. One must be thoughtful always desiring to do what love would do. There will be times when thoughts of retaliation may come to mind, but the love process continues by bearing with the other person and forgiving the person by making the choice to do so. Each person must be given time to do better, to become better. As you learn, you will desire to do what is best and what is right. This process does not occur over night. It is indeed a process.

In essence, even though a person is spoken to in a manner that is offensive, because of the love of God that is operating in the heart and the grace that is given, one would naturally respond in a manner that is not offensive nor would an offense be taken. Each person must remember that love is a decision and the process continues. A decision should be made by each person to respond in a loving and kind manner even when there

is emptiness inside.⁶⁹ Some people take longer to implement the love process that is needed to endure a lasting relationship. Therefore, love has to be developed within their hearts. However, even though a person knows that love is the true way, patience must be exercised on behalf of each person. It takes time for people to get it. People tend to want to do it their way not God's way. So, love must be within a person. Therefore, time must be given to allow change to occur, room must be given for mistakes and for growth. This requires patience and a will to understand. If a person is able to operate in love, the relationship has a better chance for growth. However, if a person is unable to operate in love, problems continue and grow. So, if each person allows the love process to develop, change will come and a great outcome will be seen. Love is essential and is extremely important to a healthy relationship in order for it to last a lifetime.

Historical Foundation

A marriage is a legally recognized union between two people, generally a man and a woman, in which they are united sexually, cooperate economically, and may give birth to, adopt, or rear children.⁷⁰ The institution of marriage and family is shaped by many inside and outside influences. These influences include the immediate community of relatives, friends, and neighbors where they exercise the approval or disapproval of a couple. The terms of marriage and divorce are set by state legislatures and judges. Additionally, the federal judicial system regulates laws, policies and values as it relates to

⁶⁹ Gary Smalley and John Trent, *Love is a Decision* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989), 35.

⁷⁰ Strong, DeVault and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 7.

incentives and disincentives to marriage forms and practices.⁷¹ God's design for marriage requires both the wife's submission and the husband's giving himself up—at the same time.⁷² Both deny themselves and sacrifice their own desires for the other, but both thereby have their desires met.⁷³

The family generally performs four important societal functions: (1) it provides a source of intimate relationships, (2) it acts as a unit of economic cooperation and consumption, (3) it may produce and socialize children, and (4) it assigns social roles and status to individuals.⁷⁴

William Doherty, of the University of Minnesota, has developed a useful framework of four family types for understanding changing family patterns.⁷⁵ The family types Doherty identifies are the institutional family (Pre-1925), the psychological family (1925-1975), the pluralistic family (1975-1990), and the intentional family (1990 into the future).⁷⁶

In the form of the law and state enforcement, the public sets the terms of marriage, says who can and cannot marry, who can officiate, what obligations and rights the agreement involves, whether it can be ended and if so, why and how?⁷⁷ Much of what

⁷¹ Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 5.

⁷² Gene Edward Veith, Jr. and Mary J. Moerbe, *Family Vocation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 87.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Strong, DeVault, and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 12.

⁷⁵ Olson and DeFrain, *Marriage and the Family*, 7.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4.

we call the traditional family and the classic law of the family were forged by Roman Catholic theologians and Canon lawyers in the first half of this millennium, then re-forged by Protestant theologians and jurists in the middle of this millennium, and transmitted with periodic reforms into the Twentieth Century. In many states, couples can obtain their license and marry on the same day.⁷⁸ There are some states that require a waiting period before a marriage can be entered into.

The Roman Catholic Church of the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries treated marriage and family as a natural, contractual and sacramental unit.⁷⁹ They recognize three aspects of this union. 1) Man and women married in order to procreate. Children would be raised with God as their focus. 2) That man and woman were married for a lifelong union. The couple would serve God. 3) When properly contracted and consummated, marriage rises to the position of being a sacrament symbolizing the eternal union between Christ and His church.⁸⁰

The most famous advocate of the married estate during the fifteenth century was Albrecht von Eyb.⁸¹ Pamphlets, tracts, poems, and plays all preached the marital fruits of love, fidelity, and procreation, with the most important product being the personal and social stability praise by Albrecht von Eyb.⁸²

⁷⁸ Witte, *Consulting a Living Tradition: Christian Heritage of Marriage and Family*, 1108-1111.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Witte, *Consulting a Living Tradition: Christian Heritage of Marriage and Family*, 1108-1111.

⁸¹ Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation German*, 60.

⁸² Ibid.

The Canon Law of the medieval church, based partly on Roman law, made consent and consummation the only conditions that needed to be satisfied for a marriage to be recognized.⁸³ The Council of Trent (1545-63) added the requirement that consent had to be witnessed before a priest in the presence of other witnesses.⁸⁴ Given this requirement a person could not be married unless they were married by a priest. This is not the case today.

In western cultures such as the United States, the only legal form of marriage is monogamy, the practice of having only one spouse at one time.⁸⁵ There are states where polygamy, having more than one wife, is practiced within the United States.

In the English legal tradition, marriage has been described as “the voluntary union for life of one woman and one man to the exclusion of all others.”⁸⁶ Most European systems have not separated marriage and family and the two are invariably found together as in, “A right to marry and found a family.”⁸⁷ For this reason when one thinks of marriage, one’s mind almost automatically turns to thoughts of family. It is unspoken, but when one marries, a family is formed.⁸⁸

After the Sixteen Century, these two theological models of marriage and family continued in western family law. The United States Supreme Court spoke of the family as

⁸³ Brenda Almond, *The Fragmenting Family* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Strong, DeVault and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 9.

⁸⁶ Brenda Almond, *The Fragmenting Family*, 22.

⁸⁷ Brenda Almond, *The Fragmenting Family*, 22..

⁸⁸ Ibid.

"a sacred obligation," "a holy estate," "a divine office" and until the middle of this century, most state laws in the United States counted only monogamous unions between a man and a woman.⁸⁹

The Protestant Reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries replaced the Catholic sacramental model of marriage with a social model.⁹⁰ Protestants regarded marriage and the family as a covenant association for the sake of the community subject to civil law.

Edward Westermarck wrote in 1936 that marriage was a social institution sanctioned by custom or law.⁹¹ Marriage contained a deep biological foundation and likely developed out of primeval habit in which, over time, the human male and female came to live together.⁹² Marriage served to meet economic and child rearing needs. These needs have changed over the years.

In society, the view of marriage as an institution has been transformed. Marriage as an institution has been replaced by the concept that marriage is a companionship grounded on romantic attraction, self-fulfillment, and ego-need gratification.⁹³ Therefore, when a man meets a woman, they fall in love. Their desire is to live together because of their love for each other. This leads them to desire a family.

⁸⁹ Witte, *Consulting a Living Tradition: Christian Heritage of Marriage and Family*, 1108-1111.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ David Blankenhorn, *The Future of Marriage* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2007), 37.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 79.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines a family as a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together in a household.⁹⁴ Luther called marriage, “The mother of all earthly laws.”⁹⁵

Families at one time were comprised of a man and a woman with a child or children. Today, families are formed in many ways. Some have no children while others are blended families. These blended families bring together children from prior relationships. At one time, people fell in love, decided to marry and had one or two children. Now, you have an abundance of people deciding to marry later in life, to have children later and to live together with the possibility of marrying later in life.

In 1865, when slavery ended in this county, the majority of African Americans could not legally marry but entered relationships that they treated like marriage but were unprotected by state laws.⁹⁶ However, in northern states (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts) slavery had ended by 1830 where African Americans could marry.⁹⁷ According to Franklin Frazier in, *The Negro Family in the United States*, slavery established a pattern of unstable black families because of lack of marriage among slaves and constant separation of families as males and older children were sold.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Strong, DeVault, and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 11.

⁹⁵ Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation German*, 26.

⁹⁶ Heather Andrea Williams. “How Slavery Affected African American Families.” *Freedom's Story*, TeacherServe©. National Humanities Center, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/essays/aafamilies.htm>

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Erol Ricketts. “The Origin of Black Female Headed Families”, accessed March 13, 2015. <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc121e.pdf>.

Slavery destroyed family bonds except those of mother and child, leading to a pattern of black families centered on mothers.⁹⁹

The concept of romantic love had its beginning in European societies during the 11th Century, where courtly love became fashionable among the privileged class.¹⁰⁰ Prior to this affection was not necessary for a relationship to move to marriage. In the 17th and 18th centuries parent-arranged marriages were popular and a romantic love existed side by side, but by the Twentieth Century, it became proper and somewhat of a formality for a man to ask for parental permission to marry the daughter.¹⁰¹ Prior to this time, a family would decide whom their daughter or son would marry.

With the 1969 Divorce Reform Act in Great Britain, the divorce rate has risen.¹⁰² In society as a whole, one in two marriages will end in divorce. People are less tolerant than ever before. It is easier now to say, let's get a divorce. Christianity equalized wives and husbands; that did not end marital hierarchy, but it required respect for the wife's position.¹⁰³ With this equalization, women now had a voice within the marriage. They were no longer required to keep quiet. Their opinions became valuable and it was alright. Increasing numbers of woman are choosing not to reproduce at all.¹⁰⁴ Many women are choosing to attend college before marriage. Even after graduating from college, many

⁹⁹ Ricketts, "The Origin of Black Female Headed Families"

¹⁰⁰ Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 59-60.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Post, *More Lasting Unions: Christianity, the Family, and Society*, 7.

¹⁰³ Cott, *Public Vows A History of Marriage and the Nation*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Karen Miller, *Family* (Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2008), 32.

women started their career before marrying. This delay in women giving birth resulted in women being more career-oriented. The value of attaining personal and individual goals seems to be placed over marriage and family. The 1990 U.S. Census reports that 42% of Black adults are married which is down from 55% in 1970 and 63% in 1950.¹⁰⁵ About 63% of Caucasians are married as compared to 58% of Hispanics.¹⁰⁶

The state high court, using reasoning about equal protection of the laws declared in December 1999 that same-sex couples deserved access to the benefits that heterosexual couples gain from marrying.¹⁰⁷ Even though Catholic, Mormon, and conservative groups mobilized in opposition, in April 2000 Vermont enacted a historic law, reserving marriage to one man and one woman, but allowing same-sex couples in the state the identical rights and protections through civil union.¹⁰⁸ Marriage, though formed by contractual consent, was more than a civil contract. The court declared, "It is a relation, an institution...and every State has always assumed to regulate it."¹⁰⁹

Marriages are strong when both partners are committed to the institution, to the relationship, and to each other.¹¹⁰ Each person has to be committed to all three aspects of the marriage in order for the marriage to be strong and long lasting. You can be committed to one or two of the three aspects, and have a difficult marriage. What makes

¹⁰⁵ Duda, *The Reference Shelf: American Family*, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Olson and DeFrain, *Marriage and the Family*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Cott, *Public Vows A History of Marriage and the Nation*, 218.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 101.

¹¹⁰ Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 90.

marriages strong is the commitment to all aspects. While the individual plays a critical role in the success of a marriage, marriage had never been left to the discretion of individuals.¹¹¹ There have always been other entities involved in the process.

Many marriage supporters argue that the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the decline of the institution of marriage by changing women's focus from the family to themselves.¹¹² Following this movement more women entered and graduated from college, and more women entered the workforce. The need for daycare centers are a direct result of this movement. Many daycares were placed within the organizations to accommodate female workers who had children.

In the 1960s, four main societal changes occurred: the sexual revolution, women's liberation movement, states' relaxation of divorce laws, and the mobility of American families.¹¹³ These changes have perpetuated the notion that women are first and foremost entitled to happiness and fulfillment. They have converged to foster family alienation, exacerbate old family rifts, and have an enormous impact on the traditional family structure.

During the years from 1967 to 1997, family life in industrialized nations changed dramatically. These changes included a divorce revolution, a sexual revolution, couples marrying later in life, drops in fertility rates, an increase in single-parent families, and an increase in the number of women working outside the home produced a different social dynamic.¹¹⁴ All of these factors have had an adverse effect on marriage. More people are

¹¹¹ Cott, *Public Vows A History of Marriage and the Nation*, 101.

¹¹² Auriana Ojeda, *The Family* (New York, NY: Greenhaven Press, 2003), 21.

¹¹³ Ojeda, *The Family*, 21.

¹¹⁴ Miller, *Family*, 22.

cohabitating, and more women are attending college making the decision to have meaningful careers before getting married and having children.

The transformation of a housewife into a paid worker outside of the home has sent tremors through the family relationship.¹¹⁵ Society has changed drastically and in many instances, you find that men and women alike desire to work and achieve their goals before marriage. This has changed the roles of the husband and wife. When both parties are working, there is a need to share many of the household chores that would have been solely dedicated to the female. Many men now stay at home with the children, while the female has become the economic provider of the family. This is yet another trend that has been becoming more prevalent in our 21st century society.

Research shows that the traditional norms and forms of the western family are in trouble. According to Tipton and Witte, from 1975 to 2000, one-quarter of all pregnancies ended in abortion in the United States, one-third of all children were born to single mothers, one-half of all marriages ended in divorce, and three-quarters of all African American children were raised without fathers regularly present.¹¹⁶ The data is alarming.

A defining trend of the 2000 – 2010 decade was the increased diversity of families.¹¹⁷ Families increasingly changed from the two-parent, two-child family with a

¹¹⁵ Miller, *Family*, 22.

¹¹⁶ Tipton and Witte, *Family Transformed*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Suzanne M. Bianchi and Melissa A. Milkie, “Work and Family Research in the First Decade of the 21st Century” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 72, (June 2010) 705 – 725. , accessed March 11, 2015, http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~jmuniz/work_bianchi_milkie2010_marriage%20and%20family.pdf.

male breadwinner and female homemaker to single parents, gay and lesbian families, divorced parents with joint custody.¹¹⁸

Social and economic changes have forced us to reevaluate men and women's roles since men are working from home and daycares are in the office.¹¹⁹ The biblical responsibility for the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church.¹²⁰ This command makes no statement about whether the husband should be the primary wage earner, do dishes, or change diapers.¹²¹

According to Baxter, there are six mutual duties of husbands and wives toward each other.

1. The husbands are to love his wives (and wives their husbands) with a true, entire, married love.
2. Husbands and wives are to live together and, where age does not prohibit, sober and modest joining for procreation, which avoids lasciviousness, unseasonableness, and whatever tends to corrupt the mind, make it vain and filthy and hinder from holy employment.
3. Do not only abhor adultery but all that tends to impurity and the violation of your marriage covenant.
4. Husbands and wife must take delight in the love, company, and converse of each other.
5. It is a great duty of husbands and wives to live in quietness and peace and avoid all occasions of wrath and discord.

¹¹⁸ Bianchi and Milkie, *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

¹¹⁹ Robert Hicks, *The Christian Family in Changing Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 17.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹²¹ Tipton and Witte, *Family Transformed*, 55.

6. A principal duty between husband and wife, with special care, skill, and diligence, to help each other in the knowledge, worship, and obedience of God, in order to their salvation.¹²²

When looking at the beginning, marriages were formed to benefit the persons economically, primarily the families. There were two families coming together for financial benefit. They had to be married by the priest and the church was involved which meant that divorce was not so readily granted because permission had to be given by the church rather than an agreement between the two parties within the marriage. Later, in history, individuals were permitted to marry because of attraction and love for each other. Today, individuals are allowed to marry and divorce because of choice. However, within some denominations, the church must approve the divorce.

There are over four million couples currently cohabiting with median age for first marriage is 26.7 for men and 25 for women.¹²³ The marriage and family unit as a whole is declining. Many who choose to marry are not mature, do not have sufficient commitment to the relationship and are not creative enough in their problem solving abilities to work through challenges as they occur.¹²⁴ The family unit has been severely weakened and divorce becomes the inevitable path to take. It is important to have a system in place before the challenges occur so that one is sufficient in problems solving so they can work through the challenges as they come.

¹²² Richard Baxter. *The Godly Home* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 127-138.

¹²³ Balswick, and Balswick, *The Family*, 79.

¹²⁴ Olson and DeFrain, *Marriage and the Family*, 8.

Theological Foundation

In the majority of the churches in America, men are at the top echelon of leadership. Liberation, and Womanist Theology have worked together to open doors for women in the church.

The term “theology of liberation” was coined by Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez (1928-), and so some people refer to Latin American theology as the “theology of liberation.” According to Justo Gonzalez the theologies of liberation should be viewed as, “A general title joining a wide variety of contextual theologies, each focusing on issues of oppression and discrimination in its particular context.”¹²⁵ Gonzalez goes on to inform us that the, “Various liberation theologies insist on the need to promote and practice justice and love, not only at the personal level, but also in societal practices and structures.”¹²⁶

Liberation theology is a way, a discipline, an exercise, that has to be lived rather than acquired as a body of information.¹²⁷ Situations such as oppression and vulnerability are designed to assist the individual to discover God which makes liberation theology peculiarly powerful.¹²⁸ Liberation Theology according to Gustavo Gutierrez is, “A theology of salvation where we are liberated by participating in the new life brought to us by Jesus Christ, and by communion with him in the mystery of his death and

¹²⁵ Justo L. Gonzalez, *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 100.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Christopher Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 4-5.

resurrection.”¹²⁹ Gutierrez further emphasizes that human are transformed by conquering their liberty through existence and history.¹³⁰

The Bible presents liberation and salvation in Christ as the total gift, which, by taking on the levels Gutierrez indicates, gives the whole process of liberation its deepest meaning and its complete and unforeseeable fulfillment. This viewpoint, therefore, permits us to consider the unity, without confusion, of the various human dimensions, that is, one's relationships with other humans and with the Lord, which theology has been attempting to establish for some time.¹³¹

Womanist Theology is one of many theologies of liberation. It is, “That form of contextual liberation theology done from the perspective of African American women. Such theology is deeply aware of the manner in which theology and Christianity have been used to justify the oppression of both African Americans in general and African American women in particular ... among the leaders of this movement are Jacquelyn Grant (1948-) and Delores Williams (1929-).”¹³²

Womanist theology is represented by the emergent voices of African American Christian women in the United States.¹³³ Alice Walker defines “*womanism*” in *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose*, black women in America are calling into question their suppressed role in African American churches, their communities, their

¹²⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), xxxvii-xi.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, xiv.

¹³² Gonzalez, *Essential Theological Terms*, 183.

¹³³ Linda E. Thomas, “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm” *Cross Currents*, Vol. 48, issue 4, (Winter 1998), accessed February 11, 2015, www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm.

families, and the larger society.¹³⁴ Walker describes the term “womanist” indicates a sense of being girlish, frivolous, irresponsible, and not serious. Based on the black folk expression of mothers to female children, the term means “you acting womanish,” or like a woman. It generally refers to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Additionally, the term means one who appreciates and prefers a women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength.¹³⁵

This theology offers opportunities for black women to fully participate in theological processes and dialogues and is based on the complex realities of black woman’s lives.¹³⁶ Womanist theologies maintain a commitment to reflect on the social, cultural, and religious experiences of black women.¹³⁷ As a form of Liberation Theology, womanist theologies aim to provide freedom for oppressed peoples. It adds the additional goals of advocating for survival, quality of life, and wholeness to black theology’s goals of liberation and justice.¹³⁸ In spite of oppression, black women have been empowered by their faith and trust in the Lord to take action. Their narratives contain a theology of hope that empowered them to endure, survive, and even transform oppressive circumstances.¹³⁹ The tasks of womanist theology are to claim history, to declare

¹³⁴ Thomas, *Cross Currents*.

¹³⁵ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, xi-xii.

¹³⁶ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 10.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 10.

¹³⁹ Crawford, *Hope in the Holler*, 3.

authority for ourselves, our men, and our children, to learn from the experience of our forebears, to admit shortcomings and errors, and to improve our quality of life.¹⁴⁰

It interpret black women's and the black community experiences in the context of theology.¹⁴¹ Delores Williams states in *Sisters in the Wilderness* that the predicament many African-American women find themselves in include poverty, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, domestic violence, homelessness, rape, motherhood, and single-parenting situations. Hagar's situation in Genesis 16: 1-16 and 21: 9-21 is representative of these situations and concerns.¹⁴² When assessing the situations African-American women have experienced it is easy to find each of the aforementioned scenarios within the lives of many women of color.

Even though, women are expected to do just as much as their counterparts, there is a great divide economically. In the United States, African-American women are at or near the bottom of the economic ladder.¹⁴³ Women compose nearly 75% of the traditional Black church, yet the higher levels of decision making do not reflect this statistic in proportionate numbers.¹⁴⁴ Although we find more women in the church, decisions are made by men who occupy positions at the top echelon of the organization. In many churches, women are not permitted to bring forth the Word of God, while in others they are permitted to teach, but not from the pulpit.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas, *Womanist Theology*.

¹⁴¹ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, xiv.

¹⁴² Ibid., xiv, 4-5.

¹⁴³ Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes and Angela D. Sims, ed., *Womanist Theological Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 50.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Womanist Theology is a response to sexism in black theology and racism in feminist theology.¹⁴⁵ When black theologians speak of “the black experience,” they only include the experiences of Black men and boys while feminist theologians unwittingly speak only of the white women’s experience.¹⁴⁶ Womanist theology draws on sources that range from traditional church doctrines, African American fiction and poetry, nineteenth-century black women leaders, poor and working class black women in holiness churches, and African American women under slavery.¹⁴⁷

Although the scripture indicates no differentiation between male and female, some Christians attempt to discourage women from being fully involved in their local church. Women are not inferior and neither are they second class citizens. Women will continue to answer God’s call because God will choose at His discretion.¹⁴⁸ Women hear the voice of God and are moved by His Spirit to answer that call. There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female. We are one in Christ. We should strive to exhibit to the world this unity in Christ.¹⁴⁹ Too often it is the world that seems to influence Christians with its notions around the “otherness” of members of those who are female.¹⁵⁰

Our beliefs influence the way we view and interact with different people. We are taught to be biased and to see differences. There are many women who have had roles in

¹⁴⁵ Monica A. Coleman, *Process Thought and Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Science Fiction as a Resource for Process Theology*, accessed April 4, 2014, www.ctr4process.org.

¹⁴⁶ Coleman, *Process Thought and Womanist Theology*.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas, *Womanist Theology*.

¹⁴⁸ Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 35.

¹⁴⁹ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 161.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

ministering the gospel of Jesus Christ in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament. These women have been used to usher in the will of God. Most Christians do not realize the impact that women have had throughout the Bible.¹⁵¹

It is clear throughout the Bible that it is God's will to use women for Kingdom purposes. It is necessary to compare scripture with scripture to find the correct meaning. We must consider all that the Bible has to say about the activities of women in kingdom functions throughout the scriptures.¹⁵²

As a unified body of believers, we are not called to attack one another. We should strive to exhibit to the world our identity in Christ. The Christian focus should be unity and oneness.¹⁵³ God is looking for yielded vessels, not perfect humans. Both Moses and David were responsible for killing a man. God chose and used them. In the New Testament we are initially introduced to Saul who is actively seeking Roman permission to kill Christians. While the scriptures recount many individuals like this. What they have in common is that each yielded themselves to God. Just as men are used of God, the same holds true for women who liberate and submit themselves to be used by God.

There are many scriptural references that support women's active participation in leadership roles. For example, Ephesians 4:4 states, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." Romans 11:29 states, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Therefore, when God calls a woman, man,

¹⁵¹ James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg, eds. *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 27.

¹⁵² Clark Kroeger, Richard Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 12.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

boy or girl, it's without repentance. James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Therefore, God gives good and perfect gifts. Additionally, after gifting, there is an expectation to work in unity even as there is one body and one Spirit. The womanist movement embraces the unity concept and attempts to function accordingly. Just as the Civil Rights Movement gave way to the Black Power Movement, similarly the Women's Rights Movement has paved the way for the Women's Liberation Movement.¹⁵⁴

The Women's Movement sought a partnership with the Civil Rights Movement believing that a collaborative relationship would benefit both groups. Webster defines a partnership as, "Two or more persons who run a business together and share in the profits and losses."¹⁵⁵ Women were not only influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, but some began their civil rights involvement in that context.

During the Civil Rights Movement, children were given intelligence tests and it was found that these test were culturally biased, socially pre-determined, and unfair to African American children.¹⁵⁶ Society also began to notice differentials between boys and girls when taking standardized tests.¹⁵⁷ There are valid reasons why African American children tested lower on standardized tests.

¹⁵⁴ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Woman's Christ and Black Woman's Jesus* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 21-22.

¹⁵⁵ Webster Dictionary, s.v. "Partnership."

¹⁵⁶ Grant, *White Woman's Christ and Black Woman's Jesus*, 22

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

These reasons come into play for females as well. The traditional role of women had been that of the primary caregiver. Girls were raised to marry and take care of the children. Given this goal, young girls were not exposed to the disciplines and the world views that young boys were exposed to. This lack of exposure placed them at a distinct disadvantage when it came to standardized testing questions. Young girls were being exposed to home economics, sewing and cooking classes. We began to understand that they were not given the same educational opportunities as boys. Time and mindsets have changed. Young girls are given equal opportunities to learn like their counterparts. Today women attend higher education institutions at the same rates as men giving them greater opportunities to achieve their potential.

The voices of women are being heard in the church as a result of the Civil Rights and Womanist Movements. As a result of women began to focus on self-affirmations. The involvement of the women in the Civil rights Movement as well as the Womanist Movement has given women the courage to pursue the rights of women in American society.¹⁵⁸

In *Ar'nt I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Deborah Gray White discusses how Black women's fertility and motherhood were fostered by slave owners as a means of capital growth, as well as social control.¹⁵⁹ During slavery motherhood superseded marriage in the slave community because white men used Black women's sexuality as a commodity to build their workforce. Marriage was not the desired outcome

¹⁵⁸ Grant, *White Woman's Christ and Black Woman's Jesus*, 22

¹⁵⁹ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Liberation Theologies in the United States* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 39.

of the relationship between slaves, but a child was the outcome. This was not due to the desire of the Black woman, but was imposed upon by the act slavery.¹⁶⁰ This contradiction in status was important because the society had two different systems resulting in the confusion we experience in the 21st century.

Womanist Theology concurs with Black Theology and Feminist Theology on the necessity of engaging race and gender in the theological conversation. Womanist Theology demands a God talk and God walk which is holistic. It seeks to address the liberation and survival issues of women, men, children, workers, gays and lesbians, as these issues relate to local and global economies.¹⁶¹ Womanist theologians, retrieve sources from the past, sort and evaluate materials, and construct new epistemologies that effect change.¹⁶²

Womanist theologians have explored the relationship between the presence of God in creation and the violation of creation.¹⁶³ Black women were considered to have far more physical strength and more capacity for pain than white women.¹⁶⁴ The image of black women as superwomen emerged from the antebellum tradition of masculinizing black women believing that they could tolerate any type of labor.¹⁶⁵ During the American

¹⁶⁰ Floyd-Thomas, *Liberation Theologies in the United States*, 39.

¹⁶¹ Thomas, *Womanist Theology*.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2006), 92.

¹⁶⁴ Crawford, *Hope in the Holler*, 113.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

slavery period, and immediately thereafter, black women continued doing the same jobs as black men.

There is still a struggle for Black woman and men in achieving and maintain a healthy marriage relationship. Many have their first child before getting married. When marriage does occur it ends in divorce 50% of the time. This is also true for the church. Black families headed by women have tripled since the 1960s. Seventy percent of all Black children live in single parent homes.¹⁶⁶

One could ultimately surmise that women and men are not informed about the strategies available to maintain a lasting relationship. As a result, they are challenged in developing and maintaining these vital relationships. It is the researcher's desire to equip women with strategies that will enable them to develop and maintain lasting and healthy relationships. As women are equipped strategies, the desired partnerships can be formed. When problems do occur, the woman will have tactics at her disposal.

The purpose of the study is to help empower and liberate women. Using their faith and trust in the Lord this cycle of oppression and vulnerability can be alleviated. Women will have concrete actions that will help them to take action, and to transform problematic situations so that their relationships can move forward in positive ways. Women will become more actively engaged because they will be better equipped. Their roles in their local churches and families will also be transformed.

This research project will offer the opportunity for the black woman to feel fully participative in the theological processes and dialogues. This project will confirm to

¹⁶⁶ Clifford L. Broman, "Work Stress in the Family Life of African Americans," *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 31 no. 6, (July 2001) 835-846, accessed November 15, 2013, www.uk.sagepub.com/pricefamchnge4e/study/articles/14/Broman.pdf.

many women that they must minister as God has called them to minister. Additionally, this research project will maintain an commitment to reflect on the social, cultural, and religious experiences of black women. Finally, this research project will enable the voices of women to be heard within the leadership of the church. This research embraces the concept of unity.

The desire is help others establish and build a relationship based on the word of God. Researching and learning strategies that others can use so that they can develop and maintain a lasting relationship is what this research is all about. Research shows that the traditional norms and forms of the western family are in trouble. Those that find themselves in relationships and marriages are in need of help. This project is just one avenue to help others be equipped to develop and maintain lasting relationships.

“If, through loving ourselves "regardless" and repairing our inner visions, we save our own lives, we have taken the first step toward our "response-ability" to save our brothers and sisters.¹⁶⁷ Self-love then is probably the most critical task we complete in establishing our commitment "to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female."¹⁶⁸ If we love ourselves before trying to love another person, the relationship is far better. Loving another person is almost impossible when self-love is missing.

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13:34) Many are taught to love themselves before others. When entering a lifelong partnership or relationship, the first thing a person should understand is how to love themselves. They then are able to move

¹⁶⁷ Cannon, Townes and Sims, *Womanist Theological Ethics*, 97.

¹⁶⁸ Cannon, Townes and Sims, *Womanist Theological Ethics*, 97.

to a position of loving one another as they love themselves. In order to do this, one must have the correct view of love and what it is to love.

The outcome is to be the best that we can possibly be in Jesus and follow the model of Jesus in each situation. The Christian endeavor is to take on His character in every opportunity that is presented. These strategies will help men and women develop the mind of Jesus. Our spirits must line up with the word, the will, the ways of Jesus. We become living epistles to be read by those that we engage. If our lives are demonstrating the characteristics of Jesus, we may cause a person to turn to Jesus. It is advantageous for us to remember that in Jesus, "We live, move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Upon committing one's life to Jesus, it is no longer about the individual. It is about the desire that the Father in heaven has for the life that is being lived.

Gender has no place as we minister for Jesus. Jesus is not like man, because humans tend to look at the outward appearance. Jesus is concerned with the heart. When we surrender we put ourselves in a position to be used by God.

We are offered the opportunity to do greater works for the sake of the gospel of Jesus. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." (John 14:12)

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodological metrics that were used to conduct the study. This study will equip women with successful strategies that will help them to navigate the issues, concerns, and problems that come with 21st century relationships. The hypothesis for this project holds that if women are pre-equipped with relationship strategies, they will be better able to nurture and maintain those relationships. This study will develop strategies that will assist in developing and maintaining healthy relationships which will help in the maintenance of healthy relationships. The study is designed to equip women with strategies that can be utilized to help them develop and maintain healthy relationships.

The research utilizes an ethnographic approach to qualitative research. The emphasis in ethnography is on studying an entire culture. Originally, the idea of a culture was tied to the notion of ethnicity and geographic location (e.g., the culture of the Trobriand Islands), but it has been broadened to include virtually any group or

organization.¹ For this study, the researcher (ethnographer) is immersed in the culture of un-married women. The researcher is an active participant and records in a journal.

Feasibility Pilot Study

A feasibility study was conducted to inform the protocol for the research. The researcher acted in the role of a participant observer of the pilot study group which consisted of six African American women. The ultimate goal of the pilot study was to determine the need for the study. The pilot study attempted to identify issues to be addressed in the actual study. Pilot participants were selected from an open forum which met once a week for ninety minutes. Participation was open to those interested and willing to commit to the time allotted for the sessions. Participants were required to be at least eighteen years of age and single.

The participants were asked to list three major problems experienced in their relationship(s) with men. Problems identified were communication, compatibility, family, honesty, roles, trust, infidelity, possessiveness, sex, and selfishness.

The Pilot Study meetings began with prayer, moved on to praise and worship, presentation of session material, followed by a brief question and answer period. The meetings were then closed in prayer. During this pilot component participants were given a pre and posttest survey, classes, and pre and post surveys.

¹ William M. K. Trochim, *Research Methods Knowledge Base*, accessed June 22, 2014, http://pdf.aminer.org/000/248/418/quantitative_and_qualitative_measures_myths_of_the_culture.pdf.

Demographic information such as age, educational level, employment status and job titles were obtained from the pilot study group. Participants were asked to indicate their relationship status. (Appendix A) The participants were then surveyed to determine their needs as it pertains to relationship development and maintenance.

Announcements soliciting participants for the Feasibility Study were made in a brochure created by the church. The announcement was also posted on the website of the church. Interested women self-identified themselves by sending their information to the researcher.

As a result of the Feasibility Pilot Study, the researcher was able to determine that there were gaps in the available research related to marriage preparation. Thus, conducting this study was feasible. The findings from the feasibility study include:

- Participants indicated that they wanted training and there was a need for training because many singles, men and women, desire to marry;
- Participants felt that the church has not addressed their issues;
- Participants suggested areas they felt needed to be addressed.

Based on the findings of the Feasibility Study, protocols were revised and adjusted to include the concerns identified. The sessions were formed based upon the feedback of the surveys given to participants of the feasibility study. Based on this information, five training sessions were designed to include:

- Session 1: Compatibility and Communication
- Session 2: Honesty and Trust
- Session 3: Fidelity and Sex
- Session 4: Roles and Family

- Session 5: Selfishness and Possessiveness

The Study Group

The project consisted of six women who participated in a focus group.

Participation was open to anyone interested and willing to commit to the time allotted for the sessions. There were only ten vacancies, and participation was on a first come bases. Each participant was a member of the Word of Life Church or was associated with a member in the congregation. The participants consisted solely of African American women. Participants signed a consent statement.

The researcher encouraged women to participate before and after church services as she engaged in verbal conversations. Once the selection invitations were extended, individuals were contacted by telephone or email with meeting times and were provided an agenda of topics.

Participants met for five weekly sessions, each running ninety minutes. During the class a survey was given to determine their needs as it pertained to relationship development and maintenance. The participants were given the opportunity to list their top three concerns with regards to developing and maintaining a relationship. They were asked to indicate the resolution that they implemented and to state the effectiveness of that resolution.

Demographic information such as age, educational level, employment status and job titles were obtained from the participants to assist in the further identification of the participants. Additionally, they were expected to indicate their relationship status: in a

committed relationship, engaged, divorced, never married, or if they were in a long term relationship.

Two of the project's Context Associates also participated in the training and assisted the researcher in distributing and collecting instruments. Communication, compatibility, family, honesty, relationship roles, trust, infidelity, possessiveness, sex, and selfishness were listed as the top problems in their relationships.

The participants came together at the researcher's home and shared more information through a pretest. (See Appendix B). During the first meeting, the pretest was administered to participants. The pretest is an instrument that uses the Likert Scale of: strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree nor disagree; agree; and strongly agree. The responses from the pretest will be the first source of data triangulation.

Session Outlines

During each of the five meetings a scenario was presented prior to the teachings. Participants were asked to respond to the scenario and to indicate their intentions to work through the issue to resolution. The participants also asked if they believed there was a solution to the problem that would allow the relationship to continue and to grow. Following the scenario, the lesson was taught. At the end of the teaching, the same scenario was given in a post-scenario format. The participants were asked to respond. The instrument is designed to measure their change in knowledge. Were these women able to apply their newly acquired strategies to the real life situations described? The responses to these scenarios represent the second source of data triangulation.

At the conclusion of each class a post test (Appendix B) was administered. This survey has two questions that allow participants to demonstrate that they know the characteristics of a successful marriage. This is the third source of data triangulation of the methodology. The data were collected and stored in a confidential location.

Data Planning

Coding was used to categorize the data. The study uses open coding, selective coding, descriptive coding, and in vivo coding to break down the qualitative responses. Open coding, considers the data in minute detail while developing some initial categories and selective coding where one systematically codes with respect to a core concept.² Descriptive coding is the sort of coding occurring in quantitative studies and identifies information that describes a situation or group of data. Every qualitative project requires this sort of information.³ In Vivo codes refer to data categories created directly from the words that participants have actually used.⁴

Data Analysis

The surveys were analyzed by coding each item with similarities and giving the percentage for each. A percentage was given for committed relationships, engaged, divorced, married, long term relationship and never married. Participants listed problems

² Trochim, *Research Methods Knowledge Base*.

³ <http://kakali.org/edld6384/8561/handouts/coding.pdf>, accessed June 27, 2014.

⁴ Ibid.

that they felt were the top three concerns and they listed solutions that they may use. This information was coded using descriptive coding where age, school and employment were indicated.

Project Coding

Ethnographers studying cultures. Originally, the idea of a culture was tied to the notion of ethnicity and geographic location (e.g., the culture of the Trobriand Islands), but it has been broadened to include virtually any group or organization.⁵ Descriptive Coding occurs in quantitative studies and stores information that describe a case. Every qualitative project requires this sort of information.⁶

In vivo coding refers to categories well named by words people themselves use.⁷ Marriage is a legally recognized union between two people, generally a man and a woman, in which they are united sexually, cooperate economically, and may give birth to, adopt, or rear children.⁸

Open coding, considers the data in minute detail while developing some initial categories and selective coding where one systematically codes with respect to a core concept.⁹

⁵ Trochim, *Research Methods Knowledge Base*.

⁶ <http://kakali.org/edld6384/8561/handouts/coding.pdf>, accessed June 27, 2014.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Strong, DeVault and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 7.

⁹ Trochim, *Research Methods Knowledge Base*.

Appendix B is a survey that uses the Likert Scale. The answers will be categorized based upon their responses to each question. All answers will be compiled and assigned a percentage. Surveys will be grouped together by question. Each answer will be listed under each question using open coding, selective coding and in vivo coding. Open coding, selective coding and in vivo coding will be utilized to categorize the answers given for each scenario.

Conclusion

Determining whether the subject group are better equipped to navigate problems common to marriage relationships will be determined by the pretest, posttest, scenarios, and surveys. These four instruments will measure:

- God's ordained marriage-a covenant;
- Determining if God is leading, communication in the marriage;
- Love in the marriage;
- Responsibility in marriage;
- Sex in the marriage;
- Conflict resolution strategies.

Women will be more prepared to develop and maintain a lasting relationship after participating in these training sessions. Not only will they have strategies at their disposal but also a greater understanding of how to implement that knowledge, thus producing the successful strategies needed to nurture a healthy relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Participants began and ended each training session by responding to a scenario related to the training topic. The same scenario was presented at both the beginning and the end of the related session. The responses to the scenarios allowed the researcher to determine if there had been any change in their desire to work through the conflict being presented in the scenario.

Each participant was surveyed to determine if they knew a couple that demonstrates the characteristics of a successful relationship. The participants were asked to list the elements that they saw that were successful. They were asked to list what they believe makes their relationship successful. Also, the participants were asked to list the characteristics that they believe make a relationship successful.

Appendix A was analyzed by coding each item with similarities and giving the percentage for each. For example, 25% of the participants report that they are in a committed relationship. A percentage was determined for each category. "Have you ever been married" was similarly categorized and assigned a percentage. Participants listed their top three relationship concerns and the solutions used to address the concern.

Appendix B uses a five point Likert Scale. Percentages were assigned for each of the five points selected by participants. The Post Survey Information was grouped together. Each answer was listed under each question. These surveys gave the participant an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings using short answers.

The five scenario responses were coded with like responses. Participants were asked to indicate the problem in the scenario. Then they were asked to make a decision as to whether they would be willing to work through the problem. They also indicated if they believed there was a solution to the problem so that the relationship will be able to continue and grow.

Analysis of Survey of Participants (Appendix A)

What is your relationship status?

33%	Committed Relationship
0%	Engaged
17%	Divorced
50%	Single and Never Married.

Have you ever been married?

33%	Married or have been married
67%	Never married

Have you ever been in a long term relationship?

67%	Yes
33%	No

What were the three major problem(s) you've experienced in your relationship(s)?

67% Communication

33% Honesty

Other problems indicated include: Maturity, Geographical distance, Ex-wife, Faith and trust in God, relationship expectations, shared interests, commitment to relationship.

What strategies did you use to resolve the problems experienced in your relationship?

17% Not in a relationship;

67% Made conscious effort to communicate more;

17% Participant ended the relationship.

Were these strategies successful in solving the problem?

17% Not in a relationship

83% No

Age range?

50% 18 - 30 years

17% 31 - 40 years

33% 41 - 50 years

Educational level completed?

17% High School Diploma

33% Junior/Community College

33% Bachelor Degree

17% Masters and above

Employment status

17%	Full time college student and not employed
33%	Customer service representatives
17%	Production technician
17%	Attorney/business consultant
17%	Secretary/administrative assistant

**Pre-Test Survey Analysis
(Appendix B)**

The pre-test was administered to all six participants before the sessions began. Participants were asked to indicate the best answer as it relates to the twenty-four questions. They were asked to respond by way of a Likert Scale.

I am open and honest about my thoughts and feeling.

67%	Agree
33%	Strongly agree

When I fight with someone, I quickly come to a resolution.

50%	Disagree
33%	Neither agree nor disagree
17%	Agree

I never hit or call names in relationships.

17%	Agree
83%	Strongly agree

I never say "I don't love you" in a relationship.

50%	Strongly agree
17%	Neither agree nor disagree
33%	Strongly disagree

I take responsibility for my words and actions.

33%	Strongly agree
50%	Agree
17%	Disagree

I will be open and honest about our sexual relationship.

67%	Strongly agree
33%	Agree

I will let my spouse share with me what pleases him.

33%	Strongly agree
33%	Agree
33%	Strongly disagree

I will share with my spouse what pleases me.

33%	Strongly Agree
50%	Agree
17%	Strongly disagree

I will let my spouse share with me what is not pleasing to him.

50%	Strongly agree
50%	Agree

I will share with my spouse what does not please me.

67% Strongly agree

33% Disagree

I will hold my spouse, hug him, and touch him every day.

83% Strongly agree

17% Agree

I will respect our private sex life.

83% Strongly agree

17% Agree

I will not use sex as a weapon or as a reward.

50% Strongly agree

33% Agree

17% Disagree

I will not make fun of my spouse sexually.

83% Strongly agree

17% Agree

I can identify my love language.

50% Strongly agree

33% Agree

17% Strongly disagree

I have developed the habit of happiness.

33% Strongly agree

50% Agree

17% Disagree

I can say what I mean and understand what I hear.

50% Strongly agree

50% Agree

After marriage, I will negotiate a different relationship with my relatives.

17% Neither agree nor disagree

33% Strongly agree

50% Agree

I will be selfless in my marriage.

17% Agree

50% Strongly agree

17% Disagree

17% Strongly disagree

I will develop understanding in my marriage.

100% Strongly agree.

I will develop trust in my marriage.

83% Strongly agree

17% Agree

I believe that the central role of father and mother is husband and wife.

50% Strongly agree

50% Neither agree nor disagree

I will make time to communicate face to face.

83% Strongly agree

17% Agree

I will make God's teaching and guidelines part of my marriage.

83% Strongly agree

17% Agree

Analysis of Pre Scenario 1 Communication and Compatibility

Audie and Sam were married two years ago. He is an avid sports fanatic. He lives and breathes sports. Every day and every night he enjoys sports either on television or at the local gym. He does not make time for dates, birthdays, holidays, nor anniversaries. Audie is always at home cooking, cleaning, or keeping busy. She daydreams about the dates she experienced with Sam before they married. She feels as though she does not exist in the relationship.

What is the problem?

"Sam is not giving Audie the time she deserves."

"Sam is ignoring Audie and no longer pursues her."

"Sam is neglecting Audie."

"The two are not on the same page."

"Sam has to think about what is important to him and his wife."

"Audie may not be communicating to Sam that his actions are hurting her."

Would you be willing to work through the problem?

100% said yes

What is the solution?

“Spending more time together and communicate to each other.”

“Sam needs to realize that he needs to spend quality time with Audie in order for their relationship to be successful.”

“Both parties should communicate their feelings. They should comprise. Audie needs to let him know her feelings and set up a date night using sports.”

“Get involved in what he loves. Try to understand his passion for sports in order for him to get involved with the things Audie likes.”

“Sam should take time out to do more activities with Audie. Audie also has to let Sam know how she feels.”

What would be the win/win solution?

- Thirty-three percent of participants said Sam could get Audie involved in some of the sporting events and teach her some of the basics.
- Seventeen percent of participant said Sam should put the marriage first.
- Seventeen percent of participant said compromise and Sam should be willing to spend time with Audie away from sports.
- Thirty-three percent of participants said that both should be involved in each other’s activities so that no one feels left out.

Is there a win/win solution?

83% Yes

17% Did not respond

Analysis of Post Scenario 1 Communication and Compatibility

What is the problem?

“He’s spending way too much time on sports and none with his wife.”

“Audie needs to begin to learn about sports. This will bring them closer.”

“Sam chooses to not make time for Audie.”

“Audie and Sam are not communicating enough to be involved with each other.”

“Audie is not communicating her feelings about spending time with her husband.”

Seventeen percent of participants did not respond.

Would you be willing to work through the problem?

83%	Yes
17%	Maybe

What is the solution?

17%	Said Audie needs to join Sam in his enthusiasm for sports, then he will gladly compensate her with what she needs.
33%	Said they need to spend more time together.
50%	Said Audie and Sam should communicate letting their feelings be known openly.

What could be the win/win solution?

33%	Said Sam should go on dates with Audie and she should go to some of his sports activities.
33%	Said Sam needs to spend more time at home and less with sports.
17%	Said Audie should put her feelings aside showing enthusiasm for sports because Sam will appreciate her efforts which may cause him to do activities she likes.
17%	Said that they need to make time for each other so that no one feels left out.

Is there a win/win solution.

83% Yes

17% Did not answer

Each participant was given a scenario to respond to before session 2 began. They were given the same scenario after they had listened and participated in the session.

Analysis of Pre Scenario 2 Honesty and Trust

Dave and Millie were married more than twenty-five years ago. They have not been intimate for over two years. Millie is concerned that Dave has a problem. He always says that he's tired, comes to bed after she goes to sleep or falls asleep before she comes to bed.

What is the problem?

33% Said he may be cheating

33% Said Dave and Millie are not being intimate

17% Said there are some trust issues between the two

17% Said Dave may not be honest about what is going on with him.

Would you be willing to work through the problems?

83% Yes

17% No

What is the solution?

83% Said Millie needs to communicate asking Dave what is going on.

17% Said they should try to get back to where they once were.

What would be the win/win solution?

17% Said Dave may need to seek professional help

17% Said they should spend more time together

17% Said Millie should consider her options

50% Said they need to communicate

Is there a win/win solution?

33% Yes

17% Maybe

17% No

33% Did not respond

Analysis of Post Scenario 2 Honesty and Trust

What's the problem?

"Dave may be seeing someone else."

"They are having trust issues."

"There is a lack of communication."

"Dave is avoiding Millie."

"Dave may not be honest about what is going on with him."

"There may be some medical issues."

Would you be willing to work through the problems?

100% Yes

What is the solution?

"Dave should see a doctor but Millie should be sensitive."

"Dave and Millie should communicate."

"They should spend more time together to get back to where they use to be."

"Dave should be more intimate with his wife."

What would be the win/win solution?

“They need to communicate more.”

“Dave needs to tell his wife the truth.”

“Dave and Millie should consider talking to someone about Dave’s issues.”

Is there a win/win solution?

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 67% | Said that Dave and Millie should communicate. |
| 17% | Said Dave should see a doctor with Millie’s support. |
| 17% | Did not respond. |

Analysis of Pre Scenario 3 Fidelity and Sex

Paul and Jamie have been married for five years. Lately, Jamie has noticed that Paul is extremely concerned about his attire. He wears more cologne than usual to work. He is obviously neater than he has ever been before. Jamie asked Paul about his behavior. Paul says nothing is going on. He states that he’s just being himself. One morning around 6:30 a.m. Paul’s cell phone rings while he’s taking a shower. The call was coming from his work number. Jamie answered. There was a woman’s voice on the phone.

What is the problem?

“Paul untruthful or Jamie is having trust issues.”

“Paul may be interested in someone at work.”

“Paul has lost interest in Jamie.”

“Paul is keeping secrets from Jamie.”

“Paul is attracted or amused by another woman.”

Would you be willing work through the problem?

17%	Undecided
83%	Yes

What is the solution?

“Jamie should ask Paul again what is really going on and pray and ask God to reveal whatever it is.”

“Paul should communicate with Jamie about what is really going on.”

“Pray, seek godly counsel and then approach Paul asking about the situation.”

“Jamie should confront Paul about the phone call and ask him to be honest.”

“They need to go to God to see what is lacking in each person and then communicate leaving the other person out of it.”

“They need to have a serious conversation so that the accusation against him can be cleared up.”

Is there a win/win solution?

“Paul should be home not giving Jamie reasons to feel insecure as she works on herself.”

“Paul and Jamie need to pray and communicates so that they can realize the reasons they feel in love with each other.”

“Maybe if Paul is willing to be open and honest about his behavior.”

“If both parties are willing to work on it.”

“It remains to be seen.”

“No”.

Analysis of Post Scenario 3 Fidelity and Sex

What is the problem?

“There is a lack of communication on Jamie’s end.”

“Paul is having an affair or what seems to be an affair.”

“Paul may be interested in a woman at work.”

“Paul and Jamie need to be more in tune with each other emotionally.”

“Paul and Jamie need to have a serious honest talk. Paul has changed suddenly and Jamie may feel insecure.”

“Paul needs to respect his marriage and his wife’s feelings.”

Would you be willing work through the problem?

100% Yes

What is the solution?

- “They need to have an honest conversation. Paul needs to explain the sudden change in behavior. Jamie needs to be willing to listen and accept the answers. Also, Jamie should begin to pray and ask God to reveal the truth to her.
- “Maybe Paul and Jamie could go to counseling to see if they could possibly work things out.
- “Paul and Jamie need to find out what the problems are and try to work through them.
- “Jamie should take Paul’s word and pray about it.”
- “They need to talk it out, find out what’s really going on and pray about the situation in order to come into an agreement. Also, have more touching, feeling, dating, holding hands and leave the other person out.”
- “Paul has to be reminded that he is married and must respect Jamie. Paul has to know that his behavior has raised suspicion.”

Question: is there a win/win solution?

- “Yes. Paul and Jamie need to talk. Paul must share all of himself with his wife. He must not leave her to her own thought of what’s the problem. Communication and dedication equals a strong marriage.”
- “Yes. Jamie could try to work a little harder to meet her husband’s physical needs. Paul could make sure to be open and honest with his wife giving her the upmost respect.
- “Yes. I feel that both parties should be honest and open about what’s right and wrong in their marriage and then decide whether they want to save it.
- “Yes. Once she prays about it God will give an answer.
- “Yes. Rekindle the passion, the attraction for each other, and be more loving to each other, in order to leave all the lack in their lives.
- “Yes. Paul is honest and Jamie is honest about her feelings as well. Paul must not do anything to make Jamie feel insecure.

Analysis of Pre Scenario 4 Roles and Family

Bill and Joan have been together since high school and married for fifteen years. However, her mother is always talking to Bill about how they should handle their household. Her mother in law tells Joan how to parent the children. Bill notices that Joan has been acting strangely when his mother visits.

What's the problem?

"Interference from the in-laws could soon render them as out/laws."

"Bill's mother is giving unwarranted advice."

"Joan has pride and mothers have control issues."

"Too much family interference."

One participant did not respond.

Would you be willing to work through the problem?

83% Yes

17% Did not respond

What is the solution?

"Both, Bill and Joan, must speak to their respective mothers individually and then perhaps together to remind them that their marriage, is just that, their marriage."

"Bill could address his mother's behavior, and Joan could try to ignore her."

"Joan needs to address her issue and allow love to take control of it."

"Less family involvement."

"The couple needs to set boundaries for their parents."

One participant did not respond.

What would be the best win/win solution?

"Sure. Once they have communicated their wishes to their mothers about minding their own business, in a loving way, all will be well."

"Both parents should keep their boundaries and respect their children's wishes."

"Not exactly, Bill might feel really uncomfortable confronting his mother."

"Yes. Visit family on a limited basis and never let them in your marriage."

Two participants did not respond.

Analysis of Post Scenario 4 Roles and Family

What is the problem?

“Two much family involvement.”

“Bill’s mother is interfering with his relation with his wife.”

“The Bible is clear about who should have a “say so” in the marriage and that’s the two people who are married.”

“Joan’s issue is pride and both mothers are controlling the situation.”

“Parents have no boundaries.”

Would you be willing to work through the problem?

83% Yes.

17% Did not respond.

What is the solution?

“Keep family at a distance.”

“Bill and Joan should set boundaries with Bill’s mother.”

“Bill and Joan must remember that in order to have a successful marriage, they must unite as one, and stick together and not allow any outside interference.”

“Bill and Joan should talk out the situation, come to an agreement, and have honest conversations with their mothers on how they will deal with their own household.”

“Bill and Joan must sit down to talk about these issues together and come up with a solution and talk to their parents.”

One participant did not respond.

What would be the best win/win solution?

“Open and honest communication about the limits of family. Keep the marriage between the husband and wife on issues relating to parenting.”

“Bill’s mother is to acknowledge the boundaries set by Bill and Joan.”

“Remind the respective mothers that God is the head of their marriage and according to His word, they must not allow anyone or anything to come between them.”

“Bill and Joan should talk to their parents. The parents should respect the boundaries that Bill and Joan put in place.”

“If they stand together everyone will respect their plans in life, as husband and wife to walk out the plans that has God has for their family.”

Is there a win/win solution.

“Yes. The lines of communication should always be open and family members kept at a safe distance.

“Yes. I think they can come to an understanding.”

“Yes. They must remain true to their vows. What God has joined together, let no in-laws interfere.”

“Yes. Bill and Joan must talk to their parents.”

“Yes. They go before the Lord and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

One participant did not respond.

Analysis of Pre Scenario 5 Selfishness and Possessiveness

John and Sue have been married for twelve years. They have four children. Their ages are six months, two years, five years and eight years old. They bring in \$30,000 a year. John is not working most of the time for various reasons. He finds odd jobs from time to time to try to make ends meet. Sue has had to maintain the household based on her income for much of the marriage. John enjoys himself with friends. He always finds a

way to get his heart's desire. He has managed to buy a boat, a motorcycle, and other items. He finds money to rebuild cars for leisure. Sue is very short with her husband. She is emotionally distressed. She's tired of paying all the bills most of the time. John notices that she has a meeting with an attorney.

What is the problem?

"John wants to do what he wants to do."

"There is a lack of communication."

"John is not being a responsible husband or father."

"John is inconsiderate of Sue."

Would you be willing to work through the problem?

83% Yes

17% No

What is the solution?

"John needs to understand his role as the head of the household."

"John should take more responsibility and talk things out with his wife."

"Sue should talk to John about the issue and seek professional help."

"John should get a full time job and stop putting all the stress on Sue."

"They need to communicate to get a better understanding."

"John needs to talk to his wife and they need to come up with a plan."

Is there a win/win solution?

83% Yes

17% No

Analysis of Post Scenario 5 Selfishness and Possessiveness

What is the problem?

“John is not supporting his family as he should.”

“John is selfish and Sue is allowing him to be by not speaking up.”

“John is selfish by putting his needs before his wife.”

“They are not on one accord and seem to be living separate lives.”

“John isn’t helping with any of the bills.”

“John has been hurt somewhere down the line or put down and just relinquished control to Sue.”

Would you be willing to work through the problem?

83% Yes

17% No

What is the solution?

“They should come together to have a discussion and pray for directions.”

“John needs to find a job that supports his family.”

“Sue needs to pray asking God how did the roles get reversed. If she played a role in the role reversal, then she needs to repent and apologize to John.”

“Sue needs to tell John how she feels.”

Is there a win/win solution?

“Yes, with open and honest communication.”

“Yes, with John contributing more financially.”

“Yes, because God can make a way for them.”

“Yes, if John takes on more responsibility to take pressure off Sue.”

“Yes. However, Sue must reaffirm her husband as the head of the house and trust the Lord to move on their behalf.”

“Yes, if John changes.

Post Survey Information (Appendix H)

At the conclusion of all 5 Life Group sessions the participant were asked:

- *Do you know a couple who demonstrates what you considered to be a successful relationship?*

17% Did not know of any successful relationships

83% Responded “yes.”

- *List the characteristics that they believe made a relationship successful.*

The 83% of the population noted the following characteristics:

“Great communication, honesty, selflessness, laughter, talking and even crying together. Also, being silly and just enjoying each other. Plus, they agree on parenting.”

“Communication, God, trust, honesty and love.”

“Love each other unconditionally. They make time for each other. They are best friends and will stand with each other through thick and thin.”

“Unconditional love for God and one another, communication, continue to date, laughter, quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.”

“Building trust, being honest, not taking every situation serious and building a strong church life together as Christians, keeping the romance on fire and taking care of each other and trust in God first.

- *Do you believe that the Life Group Sessions provided strategies that would be helpful in the development of healthy relationships?*

Response was 100% Yes.

- *What strategies do you believe were most helpful?*

“Knowing that my marriage is not for me but for my husband.”

“The session on selflessness.”

“Being completely honest about feelings even if it is uncomfortable to do so.”

“Learning the importance of prayer, and communication in a relationship.”

“Being mindful of my mate’s needs, and also understanding that if we put God first in our relationship, then we will have a successful union.”

- *What topic do you feel will be most helpful to you as you develop a future relationship.*

100% said communications

- *Why do you believe that this particular session will be helpful?*

“I learned that I really need to open up and share.”

“I realize now it’s not all about me.”

“I know now that we must pray together.”

- *Is there a topic that you feel will be beneficial that we did not cover?*

Financial strategies was listed by one participant.

Analysis of Post Test Survey (Appendix B)

I am open and honest about my thoughts and feeling.

17% Strongly agree

83% Agree

When I fight with someone, I quickly come to a resolution.

50% Agree

17% Disagree

33%	Neither agree nor disagree
<i>I never hit or call names in relationships.</i>	
50%	Strongly agree
17%	Agree
17%	Strongly disagree
17%	Neither agree nor disagree
<i>I never say "I don't love you" in a relationship.</i>	
67%	Strongly agree
17%	Strongly disagree
17 %	Neither agree nor disagree
<i>I take responsibility for my words and actions.</i>	
50%	Strongly agree
50%	Agree
<i>I will be open and honest about our sexual relationship.</i>	
83%	Strongly agree
17%	Agree
<i>I will let my spouse share with me what pleases him.</i>	
50%	Strongly agree
50%	Agree
<i>I will share with my spouse what pleases me.</i>	
50%	Strongly agree
50%	Agree
<i>I will let my spouse share with me what is not pleasing to him.</i>	
67%	Strongly agree
17%	Agree
17%	Disagree

I will share with my spouse what does not please me.

50% Strongly agree

33% Agree

17% Disagree

I will hold my spouse, hug him, and touch him every day.

83% Strongly agree

17% Agree

I will respect our private sex life.

100% Strongly agree

I will not use sex as a weapon or as a reward.

67% Strongly agree

17% Agree

17% Disagree

I will not make fun of my spouse sexually.

100% Strongly agree

I can identify my love language.

50% Strongly agree

33% Agree

17% Disagree

I have developed the habit of happiness.

50% Strongly agree

33% Agree

17% Neither agree nor disagree

I can say what I mean and understand what I hear.

67% Strongly agree

33% Agree

After marriage, I will negotiate a different relationship with my relatives.

67%	Strongly agree
17%	Agree
17%	Neither agree nor disagree

I will be selfless in my marriage.

50%	Strongly agree
17%	Agree
17%	Disagree
17%	Strongly disagree

I will develop understanding in my marriage.

83%	Strongly agree
17%	Agree

I will develop trust in my marriage.

100%	Strongly agree
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I believe that the central role of father and mother is husband and wife.

83%	Strongly agree
17%	Agree

I will make time to communicate face to face.

100%	Strongly agree
------	----------------

I will make God's teaching and guidelines part of my marriage.

100%	Strongly agree.
------	-----------------

The Post Test revealed significant changes. Two scenario questions showed significant change. In the Selfishness and Family Scenarios when asked: "*Would you be willing to work through the problem?*" the answers indicate that there was no change. There was a positive change from 83% to 100% for question one on the Fidelity and Sex scenario. The Communication scenario showed a negative change, from 100% to 83%.

In question two, when the participants were asked is there a win/win solution? There is a significant increase from the pre-scenario to the post-scenario for Selfishness, and Fidelity, Family, and Sex Scenarios. There was no change between the Pre and Post Communication scenarios.

- Would you be willing to work through the problem?
- Is there a win/win solution?

	Pre-Scenario	Post-Scenario	Pre-Scenario	Post-Scenario
Selfishness	1.83% - Yes	83% - Yes	2.83% - Yes	100% - Yes
Infidelity and Unfaithfulness	1.83% - Yes	100% - Yes	2.67% - Yes	100% - Yes
Family	1.83% - Yes	83% - Yes	2.67% - Yes	83% - Yes
Communication	1.100% - Yes	83% - Yes	2.83% - Yes	83% - Yes
Sex	1.83% - Yes	100% - Yes	2.33% - Yes	67% - Yes

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This project focused on women who desire to be equipped with strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships that will endure. The Feasibility Study consisted of six women, and the Project Study also consisted of six women. In total, there were twelve African American women who were equipped with strategies to work through conflict while developing and maintaining healthy relationships.

Reflections

Each participant was excited to be able to participate in the project because they believe that it is important to learn strategies that can aid in the development and maintenance of a relationship. Two of the participants said they had joined together in agreement for eight years to be closer friends as they prepared and waited to marry. They both said that their main propose for becoming closer friends was to give support and encouragement to each other. They said that they felt isolated within the church as singles because there had not been programs in place to develop and prepare them for relationships and marriage. As a result of the project, they felt that they were making progress as they prepared for marriage. These two ladies said that when they were informed about the project, they knew it was an answer to their prayers. One said she was

very reluctant until they talked it over. They had prayed for an opportunity to learn strategies that would help them once they were in a relationship. They both indicated that they felt that God had ordained that they participate in the research.

These two participants are currently dating and have a desire to marry their current partner. At the last session, one of these two women announced that her current relationship had progressed and would be starting marriage counseling with the church. They were scheduled to begin pre-marital counseling the following week.

Another participant shared that she had encountered difficulty while dating which caused her to rethink the dating process. She shared some very intimate information with me which had caused her to stop dating while becoming closer to God as she prepared for marriage. As a result of her participation in the research project, she indicated that she believes she made the right decision to stop dating and prepare for a relationship.

Each participant was asked if they knew a couple who currently demonstrate what they consider to be a successful relationship. Only one of the participants said that she did not know anyone with a successful relationship. The other participants were able to list characteristics. Armed with this knowledge, they are now better prepared to identify strategies for a successful relationship. These visual examples of success will help them as they begin to develop a relationship.

The characteristics noted are:

“Great communication, honesty, selflessness, laughter, talking, and even crying together. Also, being silly and just enjoying each other. Additionally, they agree on parenting.”

“Communication, God, trust, honesty and love.”

“Love each other unconditionally. They make time for each other. They are best friends and will stand with each other through thick and thin.”

“Unconditional love for God and one another, communication, continue to date, laughter, quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.”

“Building trust, being honest, not taking every situation serious and building a strong church life together as Christians, keeping the romance on fire and taking care of each other and trust in God first.”

The participants were asked to list the characteristics that they believe make a relationship successful. Participants responded:

“Communication, honesty, and faithfulness to God and one another. Also, compromising and agreeing on parenting and financial matters.”

“Trust and honesty will make everything successful.”

“Communication, God, trust, honesty and love.”

“Love, kindness, honesty, trustworthiness, faithfulness, loyalty, and respect.”

“Love God first and then yourself, communication, keep the relationship fun, spend time doing things apart with friends, prayer, and financial stability.”

“Being loving, understanding, honest, trusting, faithful, giving, peaceful, kindness, laughter, joyful, having a strong Christian base life with God, be a good care-taker, and have balance in life.”

Conclusion

The project experience was one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had in a very long time. Connecting with these women of faith, hearing their stories, their challenges and how they have overcome inspired me. As a result of the project, I realize that this project was in the heart of God. It has been the fulfillment of a ministry where I had worked with women over the years without any formal class. As a result of the project, I learned that many of the single women feel that they need more attention within the church. They sense that more focus is on other groups and the single women feel unattended and left out. As a minister to women, this gave me the opportunity to share the gift that God has placed within me. Preparing women one on one has always been a part of my life, but actually having a group of women to take part in the sessions was a mile stone for me.

Preparing women for relationships and marriage is not a ministry that is found within churches. There seems to be an expectation that as we grow, we learn what is expected in relationships and marriage and things just fall in place. However, each field of study has a preparation stage. Therefore, why shouldn't there be preparation for building relationships and marriages?

One of the main issues that was addressed is the communication. The women of the group feel that men should have a program within the church that teaches them to share more openly. Communication within the relationship was one of the primary

concerns for the women. They feel that men do not open up to talk as much as they need to in order for the relationship to move forward more smoothly.

The results of my coding analysis demonstrated that when communicating participants should consider the other party as well as themselves and the relationship as a whole. A result of the analysis showed that the women were willing to work to find a win-win solution which leads me to believe that people really do want to work through the development and maintenance of the relationship.

Strategies for a Healthy Marriage

These twenty strategies have been identified in the research as being instrumental tools in the development and maintenance of healthy relationships. If practiced they can provide invaluable assistance to a relationship.

- Communicate frequently
- Communicate clearly
- Have intimate conversations
- Communicate with love and understanding
- Talk face to face
- Be honest
- Focus on the needs of your partner
- Learn your partners love language
- Becoming friends
- Protect your relationship
- Plan fun activities that you can do together
- Be loyal to your partner
- Set boundaries with family and friend
- Learn about your partner's dreams
- Put your partner first
- Set goals for the relationship
- Flirt, kiss and touch often

- Work to create win-win solutions to relationship problems
- Make yourself available for sex
- Be flexible with family roles

Observations

Meeting, talking, laughing and seeing the women experience understanding was fulfilling for me. As a result of the research project, I also realized that there is a great need for the ministry to single women and men within the church.

When I began this process, I did not have a context. I am not a minister employed with the church and I am not in a leadership position at the church. Therefore, I knew that I would not be permitted to teach a class. I am part of the congregation volunteering my time. I had planned to host my classes at the local library inviting people through my Facebook page. God had other plans. He miraculously opened the door for me to teach the classes through my church. This was a miracle.

This experience gave the participants an opportunity to connect on a related subject, a desire to prepare for relationships and marriage. There was a lot of excitement in each meeting as we experienced what God was doing within us.

One of the participants said she had been divorced for over ten years, and said that if she had the opportunity for this type of training, she would have been more equipped for the problems that she encountered in her marriage. She said if she had understood more, she would probably still be married.

Another participant indicated that in relationships, she had always acted too fast. She said she has learned as we discussed the material in each session that she has to stop and listen to the Holy Spirit before making decisions.

Another participant who is in a committed relationship, said that she realizes that she had to deal with problems within herself, before she would be able to adequately deal with problems in a relationship. She felt that she was being too selfish. As a result of the sessions, she realizes that she has to take the focus off herself and put it on the person and the relationship.

As a minister to women, this gave me the opportunity to share the gift that God has placed within me. I have often wondered why marriage is treated different than other areas of life especially since there are so many conflicts occurring within marriages. Marriage is one of the most important decisions that a person will make in life. There have been marriages that have lasted well over ten, twenty, thirty, forty, and even fifty years. With more preparation, these marriages can endure even longer.

One of the participants, brought her daughter to listen during one of the sessions. This mother said that her daughter who is only sixteen has always wanted to be married. The mother believes that there should be special training for young girls and boys even in high school. This mother felt that the training that we were taking part in should be shared with younger girls and boys within the high school setting.

Small group settings have proved to be very effective with the churches for many reasons. It has allowed women and men with the same desire to connect, to share, to benefit from each other's experiences, and from the research. As a result of this project, these participants now have more strategies that they will be able to use within their relationships. Prayerful, when they began a relationship, they will remember, the strategies and used them as needed.

The results of my coding analysis demonstrated that when communicating participants should consider the other party as well as themselves and the relationship as a whole. When thinking and making decisions based upon the good of the relationship, then you are more willing to work through the development and maintenance of the relationship as problems occur.

A result of the analysis showed that the women were willing to work to find a win-win solution. This leads me to believe that people really do want to work through their issues and that it may be that they do not because they do not have the skills and/or knowledge to do so. This very well could be the reason that so many abandon their relationships.

For over thirty plus years, God has used the researcher to teach women and girls individually concerning relationships and marriage. I have had opportunities to share with women that were engaged, single, committed as well as those that were about to divorce. Each time, the result has been positive. There have been several times where women have said, if I had realized this information before I got a divorce, I would have been able to work through the situation.

I believe that God has used me to minister to the participants. This is an area that I know with certainty that God has ordained me for and called me to. There are many women in the church who desire such a ministry. Many women feel that they need more skills to navigate through the problems and challenges that occur within relationships. This model presents one solution.

Recommendations

One recommendation is that preparing women and men for relationships and marriage should be more common in the local churches across America. Churches should be equipping individuals with strategies for healthy and lasting marriages. Both men and women can benefit from this training. In addition, these preparation classes can be taught at seminaries throughout the country. Each semester a course should be offered.

Preparing women for marriage will continue to be a Life Group at Word of Life Church. These workshops will also become a part of a yearly women's conference that is held in the spring of each year.

In an effort to assist women to better understand the importance of having strategies, the researcher will bring forth a book.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS

SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS

Directions: Please read the questions below and answer accordingly.

Age:

- 18-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61+

What is your relationship status?:

- Committed Relationship
- Engaged
- Divorced
- Never Married

Please answer yes or no to the following two questions:

- Have you ever been married?
- Have you ever been in a long term relationship?

Educational Level Completed:

- High School Diploma
- Junior/Community College
- Bachelor Degree
- Masters or above

Employment Status:

- Unemployed
- College Student (not working)
- College Student (working)
- Working Part time
- Working Fulltime

Please indicate your job title.

According to a recent survey, the top three problems that people have in relationships are 1. Infidelity (Unfaithfulness), 2. Growing Apart, 3. Incompatibility.

- What are the three major problems you've experienced in your relationship(s)?
- What strategies did you use to resolve the problems experienced in your relationship?
- Were these strategies successful in solving the problems?

APPENDIX B

PRE AND POST TEST SURVEY

PRE AND POST TEST SURVEY

1. Strongly Disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither Agree nor Disagree	4. Agree	5. Strongly Agree
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Please use the Likert Scale above to provide the best answer to the questions below.

1. I am open and honest about my thoughts and feelings.
2. When I fight with someone, I quickly come to a resolution.
3. I never hit or call names in relationships.
4. I never say "I don't love you" in a relationship.
5. I take responsibility for my words and actions.
6. I will be open and honest about our sexual relationship.
7. I will let my spouse share with me what pleases him.
8. I will share with my spouse what pleases me.
9. I will let my spouse share with me what is not pleasing to him.
10. I will share with my spouse what does not please me.
11. I will hold my spouse, hug him, and touch him every day.
12. I will respect our private sex life.
13. I will not use sex as a weapon or as a reward.
14. I will not make fun of my spouse sexually.
15. I can identify my Love Language.
16. I have developed the habit of happiness.
17. I can say what I mean and understand what I hear.
18. After marriage, I will negotiate a different relationship with my relatives.
19. I will be selfless in my marriage.
20. I will develop understanding in my marriage.
21. I will develop trust in my marriage.
22. I believe that the central role of father and mother is husband and wife.
23. I will make time to communicate face to face.
24. I will make God's teaching and guidelines part of my marriage.

APPENDIX C

SESSION ONE: COMMUNICATION AND COMPATIBILITY

SESSION ONE: COMMUNICATION AND COMPATIBILITY

Pre Scenario 1: Audie and Sam were married two years ago. He is an avid sports fanatic. He lives and breathes sports. Every day and every night he enjoys sports either on television or at the local gym. He does not make time for dates, birthdays, holidays, nor anniversaries. Audie is always at home cooking, cleaning, or keeping busy. She daydreams about the dates she experienced with Sam before they married. She feels as though she does not exist in the relationship. *Please answer the following five questions:*

- What's the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

Session 1 Training Materials

1. *Sending and receiving a clear message.*

Good communication is the art of sending and receiving a clear message.¹

Good communication is the key that opens the door to a healthy, happy and stable marriage.² Communication is the most important factor in a good marriage. It has been said that communication to a relationship is like blood to the human body.

2. *The need to talk*

People need to talk. We are social creatures. Especially early in the relationship, talk is the key to the right kind of intimacy.³ It is important to make time to sit face to face to talk in a relationship.

3. *How to communicate to your partner*

Verbal is speaking it out of your mouth.

Non-Verbal can be written, facial, or body language.

Communication must be done in a manner in which the other person understands what is being communicated. Therefore, when a message is sent whether verbal or non-verbal, it needs to be clear. In order to insure that the other person understands and has received the message, the person receiving the communication should restate what was said. This will render clarity and ensures that the person receiving the message received the message properly.

¹ Hardin and Sloan, *Getting Ready for Marriage Workbook*, 26.

² Ibid., xvi.

³ George. *Married for Real*, 48-49.

When communication is given, the tone must be considered. The sender who is the person speaking must speak in a tone that is not offensive or hurtful. When speaking the sender must chose words that are appropriate as well.

4. *The Love Languages*

Touch
Words of affirmation
Quality Time
Gifts
Acts of Service

5. *Healthy expectations in marriage*

Happy couples have healthy expectations, realistic concept of love, positive attitudes and outlooks of life, communicate their feelings accept and understand gender differences, make decisions and settle arguments, and have a common spiritual foundation and goal.⁴

6. *A solid friendship in marriage*

A relationship with a solid friendship, lots of fun, some flirting going on regularly, and physical touch are ways to encourage a healthy relationship.⁵

7. *Is God leading*

Rainey gives the components of a Biblical decision to determine if God is glorified in leading towards marriage. The components are God's Word, Prayer, Godly Counselors, Desire and Circumstances, and the Inner Leading of the Holy Spirit. The potential marriage should involve all aspects. As you look over the relationship, you should be able to see that God was bringing you together.⁶ If you will seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness and let that agenda drive your decision regarding whom you choose to marry and refuse to compromise on that, you will set yourself up for a much more fulfilling, spiritually enriching, and overall more satisfying marriage.⁷ Compromising will lead to great frustration and even regret.⁸

There are three foundational components of an Oneness Marriage. King Solomon spoke of the mortar of the marriage merger in Proverbs: "By wisdom a house is build, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are

⁴ Leslie Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts, Seven Questions to Ask Before and After*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 15.

⁵ Burns, *Creating an Intimate Marriage*, 114.

⁶ Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage*, 127.

⁷ Thomas, *The Sacred Search*, 22.

⁸ Ibid.

filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (Proverbs 24:3-4 RSV). Developing intimacy, trust and understanding forms Oneness in Marriage.⁹

Related Scriptures:

Proverbs 12:18; Proverbs 15:1; Proverbs 25:15; Proverbs 29:20; Psalms 133:1; Amos 3:3; Philippians 2:14-16; I Thessalonians 5:13; II Corinthians 1:7.

Post Scenario 1: Audie and Sam were married two years ago. He is an avid sports fanatic. He lives and breathes sports. Every day and every night he enjoys sports either on television or at the local gym. He does not make time for dates, birthdays, holidays, nor anniversaries. Audie is always at home cooking, cleaning, or keeping busy. She daydreams about the dates she experienced with Sam before they married. She feels as though she does not exist in the relationship. Please answer the following five questions:

- What’s the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

⁹ Rainey, *Staying Close*, 28.

APPENDIX D

SESSION TWO: HONESTY AND TRUST

SESSION TWO: HONESTY AND TRUST

Pre Scenario 2: Dave and Millie were married more than twenty-five years ago. They have not been intimate for over two years. Millie is concerned that Dave has a problem. He always says that he's tired, comes to bed after she goes to sleep or falls asleep before she comes to bed. *Please answer the following five questions:*

- What's the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

Session 2 Training Materials

1. Openness in a relationship

Every experienced therapist will tell you that openness is at the root of the strongest love relationships.¹ In a relationship, you want to be able to speak freely and share freely. However, a poll of one thousand married couples interviewed separately and published in Reader's Digest, confirms that truth isn't faring well in marriage. Dishonesty is emerging as the rule rather than the exception.² Not only does openness help lift depression and counter loneliness, it revitalizes intimacy.³

2. Dishonesty in a relationship

Married couples are finding it easier to be dishonest than speak the truth in love. Honesty is one of the most important emotional needs and when it's met, love can be triggered.⁴

3. Trust in a relationship

You can't have love without trust. Trust makes love come alive.⁵ Trust is a skill to be learned and a choice to be made which is shared with those who appreciate its importance.⁶ The trust imperative is so woven into our being that there is actually a

¹ Block, *Naked Intimacy*, 2003, 2.

² Ibid., 25.

³ Ibid., 5.

⁴ Harley, *Love Busters*, 307.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cynthia Lynn Wall and Sue Patton Thoele, *The Courage to Trust* (Oakland, CA: New harbinger Publications, Inc., 2004), 5.

trust hormone, oxytocin, whose main function appears to give us the ability to trust.⁷ Trust-not mistrust-is our default mode as a species.⁸ We are more prone to trust than we are to not trust a person.

Related Scriptures:

Proverbs 12:22; II Corinthians 8:21; Philippians 4:8-9; John 8:32; Hebrews 13:18.

Post Scenario 2: Dave and Millie were married more than twenty-five years ago. They have not been intimate for over two years. Millie is concerned that Dave has a problem. He always says that he's tired, comes to bed after she goes to sleep or falls asleep before she comes to bed. *Please answer the following five questions:*

- What's the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

⁷ Kirshenbaum, *I love You, but I Don't Trust You*, 16.

⁸ Ibid.

APPENDIX E

SESSION THREE: FIDELITY AND SEX

SESSION THREE: FIDELITY AND SEX

Pre Scenario 3: Paul and Jamie have been married for five years. Lately, Jamie has noticed that Paul is extremely concerned about his attire. He wears more cologne than usual to work. He is unusually neater than he has even been before. Jamie asked Paul about his behavior. Paul says nothing is going on. He states that he's just being himself. One morning around 6:30 a.m. Paul's cell phone rings while he's taking a shower. The call was coming from his work number. Jamie answered. There was a woman's voice on the phone. *Please answer the following five questions:*

- What's the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

Session 3 Training Materials

1. Abstinence in the Relationship

Before marriage, the physical element should not be the most important aspect of your relationship. Many counselors recommend abstinence.¹

2. Men and Women Think Differently about Sex

Men and women also think differently about sex. Regardless of the male or female perspective on sex, God created sex and it is a process of intimate communication with the act of physical intercourse designed to strengthen the marriage.²

3. The Purposes of Sex

Sexual intercourse is for procreations, physical and emotional needs, and pleasure.³ God has created you so your thoughts, expectations, feelings, and wishes can become known to your partner through the erotic possibilities your body provides.⁴ Touching, holding, and hugging are not something you should do; they are something you must do to communicate your love for one another.⁵

¹ George and George. *Married for Real*, 141.

² Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage*, 105.

³ Chapman, *The Marriage You've Always Wanted*, 108-109.

⁴ Hunt and Hunt, *Growing Love in Christian Marriage*, 62.

⁵ Hardin and Sloan, *Getting Ready for Marriage Workbook*, 189.

Marriage is designed to meet that need for intimacy and love and does not mean that individuals would lose their identity.⁶

4. *Scriptures on Sex*

King Solomon wrote a very candid and beautiful illustration of sexual intimacy in the book of the Bible entitled Song of Solomon. “My beloved is to me as cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi” (Song of Solomon 1:14 NKJV). God wants your sexual relationship to be an oasis of refreshment and beauty for you and your spouse.⁷

Related Scriptures:

I Corinthians 7:1-40; Hebrews 13:4; Proverbs 5:15-19; I Corinthians 7:2; I Corinthians 7:2-5; I Corinthians 6:18; I Corinthians 6:9-10

Post Scenario 3: Paul and Jamie have been married for five years. Lately, Jamie has noticed that Paul is extremely concerned about his attire. He wears more cologne than usual to work. He is unusually neater than he has even been before. Jamie asked Paul about his behavior. Paul says nothing is going on. He states that he’s just being himself. One morning around 6:30 a.m. Paul’s cell phone rings while he’s taking a shower. The call was coming from his work number. Jamie answered. There was a woman’s voice on the phone. *Please answer the following five questions:*

- What’s the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

⁶ Chapman, *The Marriage You’ve Always Wanted*, 104.

⁷ Burns. *Creating an Intimate Marriage*, 67.

APPENDIX F

SESSION FOUR: ROLES AND FAMILY

SESSION FOUR: ROLES AND FAMILY

Pre Scenario 4: Bill and Joan have been together since high school and married for 15 years. However, her mother is always talking to Bill about how they should handle their household. Her mother in law even tells Joan how to rear the children. Bill notices that Joan has been acting strange when his mother comes by to visit. *Please answer the following five questions*

- What's the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

Session 4 Training Materials

Major Roles:

The Husband/Wife

Marriage actually changes people's goals and behavior in ways that are profoundly and powerfully life enhancing.¹ The Bible also identifies specific and distinct roles for a husband and wife.² In Genesis 1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

The Father/Mother

The central roles are father and mother, husband and wife.³ In the book of Ephesians, husbands are commanded to love their wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Husbands need wives to affirm, appreciate, connect, support, encourage, engage, and enjoy them as she stands by him forever.⁴ A wife's priorities should be faith, loving and serving their families, therefore, selfishness must be excluded.⁵ Wives are to love and respect their

¹ Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 17.

² Rainey, *Preparing for Marriage*, 163.

³ Gilder, *Men and Marriage*, 6.

⁴ Terkeurst, *Capture His Heart*, 13.

⁵ Schacht, *The Good Wife's Guide*, 2

husbands.⁶ The love and respect must be present in all facets of life. For most people at most times, marital roles lead men and women to act in responsible ways.⁷

Family Relationships:

In-laws

The Bible says to leave and cleave. Therefore, a man must cleave to his wife and the wife is to cleave to her husband. There are ways to deal with in laws in a successful way. Realize that your in-laws come from a different background, deal with reality, your in-laws aren't your parents, and set boundaries.⁸ Mother in law problems are dated even in the Bible in Genesis 27:46 Rebekah was complaining to her husband about her possible daughters in laws. After marriage, the couple must negotiate a different relationship with their parents, siblings, and in-laws. Loyalties shift from their families of orientation to their newly formed family.⁹ Therefore, you must learn to deal with each person that is connected to him. When children grow up and marry, our opinion continues but should it? They have been reared to make good sound judgment but do we allow them? We are to love our children and their spouses unconditionally. Their lives and their decisions belong to them.

Step children

Blended families happen when individuals enter marriage with children from prior relationships. When families blend, stepchildren can be blamed for the marital woes. Recognize that stepchildren are the flesh and blood of and are closely knitted to your spouse. Marriage won't work when you draw separate lines.¹⁰

⁶ Peace, *The Excellent Wife*, 4-5

⁷ Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 25.

⁸ Creflo Dollar and Taffi Dollar, *The Successful Family* (College Park, GA: Creflo Dollar Ministries, 2002), 156-157.

⁹ Strong, DeVault, Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 289-290.

¹⁰ Delgado, *Satan, You Can't Have My Marriage*, 11.

Flexibility in Family Roles

Flexible family roles, by contrast, may increase the gains from specialization, allowing husbands and wives to take better advantage of their own individual tastes and talents.¹¹ There is evidence that African American families socialize their daughters to be more independent than Caucasian families do.¹² African American's roles may be attributed to a combination of the African heritage, slavery (which subjugate women to the same labor and hardships as men), and economic discrimination that pushed women into the labor force.¹³ People of color experienced separation of work and family, no haven of private life, and no protected domesticity. Women's work outside of the home was an extension of their family responsibilities, as family members-women, men, children-pooled their resources to put food on the table.¹⁴

Related Scriptures:

Genesis 2:18; Genesis 2:24-25; Proverbs 18:22; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:7.

Post Scenario 4: Bill and Joan have been together since high school and married for 15 years. However, her mother is always talking to Bill about how they should handle their household. Her mother in law even tells Joan how to rear the children. Bill notices that Joan has been acting strange when his mother comes by to visit. *Please answer the following five questions*

- What's the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

¹¹ Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 29.

¹² Strong, DeVault, and Cohen, *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 117.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁴ Baca-Zinn, *Feminist Rethinking from Racial-Ethnic Families*, 20-21.

APPENDIX G

SESSION FIVE: SELFISHNESS AND POSSESSIVENESS

SESSION FIVE: SELFISHNESS AND POSSESSIVENESS

Pre Scenario 5: John and Sue have been married for twelve years. They have four children. Their ages are six months, two years, five years and eight years old. They bring in \$30,000 a year. John is not working most of the time for various reasons. He finds odd jobs from time to time to try to make ends meet. Sue has had to maintain the household based on her income for much of the marriage. John enjoys himself with friends. He always finds a way to get his heart's desire. He has managed to buy a boat, a motorcycle, and other items. He finds money to rebuild cars for leisure. Sue is very short with her husband. She is emotionally distressed. She's tired of paying all the bills most of the time. John notices that she has a meeting with an attorney. *Please answer the following five questions*

- What's the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

Session 5 Training Materials:

Possessiveness in Relationship

Possessive people are jealous people who have learned this behavior.¹ Self-defeating behavior is characteristic of the jealous or possessive person and is a problem to both parties.² They go to no end to state what they feel is right and believe every word that they say even though they may be completely inaccurate about a situation. However, possessive, jealous, selfish people defend their position to the very end. When two persons come together, there must be an understanding that no one is perfect. There will be problems in the relationship. There will be disagreements as two become one.

¹ Hauck, *Overcoming Jealousy and Possessiveness*, 138-139.

² *Ibid.*, 20.

However in every enduring marriage there is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person.³

Selfishness in Relationships

In a recent article, the author explains that he was having some concerns and fears about getting marriage. His dad had a conversation with him and explained that marriage isn't for you, it's not about you. Marriage is about the person you are marrying. A true marriage (and true love) is never about you. It's about the person you love—their wants, their needs, their hopes, and their dreams. Selfishness demands, "What's in it for me?", while Love asks, "What can I give?"⁴ If we desire for our marriages to move forward instead toward the divorce court, one should give our spouse the first consideration. We should consider others before ourselves.

Related Scriptures:

Philippians 2:4; I John 3:17; I Corinthians 10:24; Galatians 6:2; Proverbs 12:15; Colossians 1:18; Romans 6, 7, 8.

Post Scenario 5: John and Sue have been married for twelve years. They have four children. Their ages are six months, two years, five years and eight years old. They bring in \$30,000 a year. John is not working most of the time for various reasons. He finds odd jobs from time to time to try to make ends meet. Sue has had to maintain the household based on her income for much of the marriage. John enjoys himself with friends. He always finds a way to get his heart's desire. He has managed to buy a boat, a motorcycle, and other items. He finds money to rebuild cars for leisure. Sue is very short with her husband. She is emotionally distressed. She's tired of paying all the bills most of the time. John notices that she has a meeting with an attorney. *Please answer the following five questions.*

- What's the problem?
- Would you be willing to work through the problems?
- What is the solution?
- What would be the win/win solution?
- Is there a win/win solution?

³ Small and Trent, *Love is a Decision*. 108.

⁴ Smith, *Marriage Isn't For You: It's for the Other Person*.

APPENDIX H

POST SURVEY STRATEGIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

POST SURVEYS STRATEGIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Strategies

- Did this workshop provide strategies that you feel will be helpful as you develop a future relationship?
- Which strategies do you feel were most helpful?
- What topic do you feel will be most helpful to you as you develop a future relationship?
- Why do you feel that this particular session will be helpful?
- Is there a topic that you feel will be beneficial that we did not cover?

Characteristics

- Do you know a couple who demonstrate that they have a successful relationship? If so, please share what you believe makes their relationship successful.
- List the characteristics that you believe make a relationship successful.

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